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BLUE BOOK



JULY, 1938

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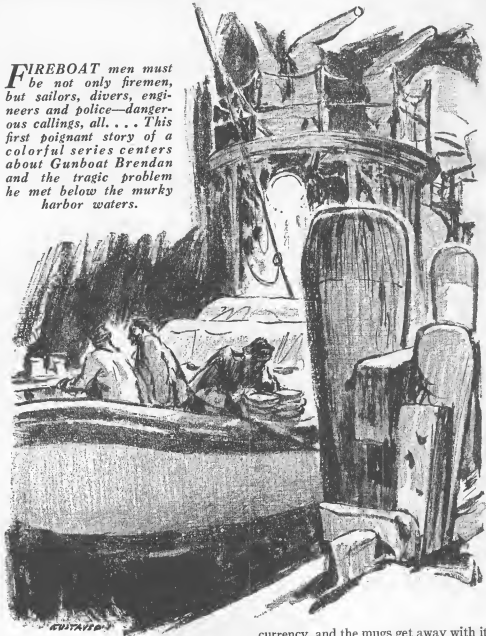
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FIREBOAT men must be not only firemen, but sailors, divers, engineers and police—dangerous callings, all. . . . This first poignant story of a colorful series centers about Gunboat Brendan and the tragic problem he met below the murky harbor waters.



BILL BRENDAN was head fireman-diver on Fireboat Two; but, a man being what his background makes him, Brendan was more than this.

Everybody in the Los Angeles harbor district knew Gunboat Brendan, the former Navy boxer, seaman gunner and so forth. . . . The Navy knew him for his work on sunken submarines; the fireboat crew knew him for what he was, and Mother Brendan knew him for what she thought he was. All this was behind his shoulder now, as he sat hulking over his pipe, listening to the police broadcast.

"My gosh, boys!" Taylor, the pilot, whistled softly. "Twenty thousand in

currency, and the mugs get away with it! Three of 'em burned down by the cops. The other two steal a parked patrol car—"

He fell silent, listening. The engineer broke out excitedly.

"Hear that? Headed for the harbor district! Reported by an officer at Main and Weford; emptied his gun into the car as it went past, but it kept on."

Brendan nodded soberly, cocking an eye at the window of the pier office.

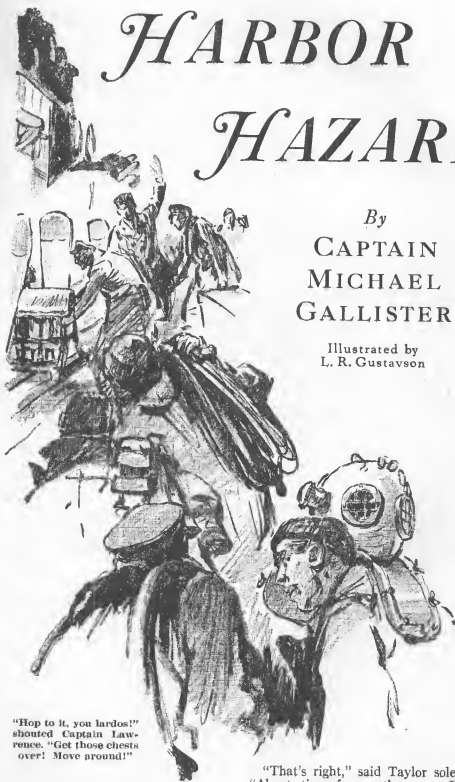
"Aint so good. Heavy fog-bank rolling up out o' the west basin tonight," he observed. "Good night for some drunk to hit Suicide Curve, too."

The police broadcast ended. There was brisk discussion of that stolen police car bearing two thugs and a small for-

HARBOR HAZARD

By
CAPTAIN
MICHAEL
GALLISTER

Illustrated by
L. R. Gustavson



"Hop to it, you lardos!"
shouted Captain Lawrence.
"Get those chests
over! Move around!"

tune, headed now for the harbor. Here
at its berth, however, Fireboat Two was
in no position to see any possible fun.
Suicide Curve, eh?

"That's right," said Taylor solemnly.
"About time for another one. Eleven
year't I been here, we've fished out sixty-four cars. Harbor Commission's been
eleven year waiting to put up stop warn-
ings at those open dead-end streets be-

tween the piers. People heading for the ferry terminal in a fog like this had better not be in a rush."

"Remember the family we fished out last winter?" growled Brendan. "That guy was just plain lost. Riles me up whenever I think o' them little tykes drowned, on account of the Harbor Commission saving money. I'd like to be a politician for about ten days."

"You'd make a hot one, all right," jeered the engineer. "You and your—Holy mackerel, listen to that! Talk of the devil, and up he comes!"

The alarm was shrilling. One and all were in motion instantly. A car off the foot of Berth 187, came the shout. A watchman had heard it go off, but knew no details; his alarm had been relayed from headquarters.

Already Fireboat Two was like a swarming beehive. Twenty firemen were loading equipment on the boat's stern, working with precise rapidity. Every instant counted, for there was always the chance of pulling somebody up alive. Not much hope of it tonight, however. This blanketing fog would keep them from getting there in time.

"Hop to it, you lardos!" shouted Captain Lawrence. "Get those chests over. Mike and Johnny, over with the diving ladder. The pump—lower away there!"

Seventy-one seconds after the alarm shrilled, they had the equipment stowed on the wide, flat stern.

Captain Lawrence shot his orders at Duke Dumas, the master-diver.

"Duke! Get Howard dressed for the first dive; slap a suit on Brendan for a stand-by, as usual. Move, you sleep-walkers! This is no pleasure cruise—"

THE Captain ran forward to where Taylor hung out of the wheel-house, whistle-cord in hand, all three annunciators on *stand-by*. His voice roared:

"All right, all right, men, let's roll! Berth 187. Give her the gun—a car's down. Come on, what's holding us?"

Pilot Taylor tooted the *cast-off* signal. These skippers were all alike, he grumbled audibly; thought a pilot could go speeding upchannel in a pea-soup fog at twenty-five knots, like the rescue wagon from Headquarters. They never seemed to realize that the fireboat master had to feel his way against harbor traffic, sounding his signals according to navigation law and regulating his speed by the same.

"The pilot can't help it," he growled, "if this makes it impossible to get folks

up from cars in time. Cars got no business going overboard anyhow." He turned to the engine-room tube as the boat, going slow speed ahead on three engines, emerged from the slip. "Five hundred revs a minute, chief. Dead slow all engines. Keep your crew set for four bells and a jingle astern."

He snapped the speaking-tube shut and took position in the center of the darkened wheel-house, while the Captain cursed softly. "Steer 355 degrees," he instructed the first mate. "Nothing to the west'ard."

"Aye," said the mate, a lean State of Maine mariner. "Three fifty-five and nothing to the west'ard." Peering into the binnacle, he rolled the wheel to port and starboard and settled on his course.

FIREBOAT TWO headed up the channel. Her air-horn tooted at minute intervals, while the watch up forward strained every sense into the woolly wall of fog that hemmed them in. A voice sounded abruptly:

"Beacon Eight dead ahead, skipper! Hear the foghorn on 175, port bow."

"Aye," said Taylor, and changed course at once. Fireboat Two cautiously nosed into Slip Five, and in another minute was alongside Berth 187.

One more minute, and apprentice-diver Howard, in stiff rubber and canvas dress, his domed helmet, hundred-pound waist weights and thirty-pound leaded shoes, was on his way into the pitch-black depths below. Forty feet of water here. An ambulance and a gathering crowd showed on the pier, dimly; so dense was the fog that even the rescue wagon's red light was no more than a dim blur.

Duke Dumas, the master diver in charge, leaned over the guard-rail, holding the air hose and life-lines. Four men aft at the pump were turning it over with measured beat, keeping the pressure at exactly fifteen pounds. Other men tended coils of life-line and hose, keeping these and the braided telephone-cable free-running at all times.

The fog swirled eerily. The mist deadened all ordinary sound, transforming the moving figures into dim wraiths of gigantic proportions. There was no excitement aboard Fireboat Two. Under the glaring flood-lights the men went about their work quietly, efficiently. Many of them had brought Navy discipline into this job. No undue noise or talk. They were hosemen, firemen, engineers, paid to fight fire and do rescue



"Twenty thousand bucks in a suitcase, see? We'll get it. . . . Five grand goes to you."

work ashore and afloat; diving duty for sunken cars was nothing novel to them.

It occasioned far more interest and excitement in the crowd on the pier—police, land firemen, reporters, morbid gawkers, watchmen. Most of them knew the procedure and discussed it as they watched the distorted shapes under the floodlights.

Usually the first diver located the car in the deep mud, made fast the hook-rope, and signaled topside to break the car out of the swiftly clutching ooze. Then, his diving-time up, he would be hauled to the deck, making his report to the battalion chief in charge. The second, or more experienced diver, would go down to open the car doors, remove the bodies within, then bend on the hook-rope preparatory to hoisting the car.

A SHADOWY figure dropped from the pier to the port side of the deck, where no one was working. Picking his way over the tangle of gear, he slipped forward to the open door of the nozzle-

room. Inside on a stool towered a monstrous figure in diving dress, but without the helmet and weights. Brendan was calmly finishing his pipe, awaiting his turn to go down. He glanced up in astonished recognition as the visitor came in.

Runt Welch was a waterfront rat of repute as vicious as his face, twitching that long ratlike nose and staring with blazing eyes that told their own story. Rumored to be a snowbird and dope-peddler, he certainly was not a person Brendan would have expected to see aboard. Welch came in, and with a nod of greeting sat down on an inhalator box.

"Hello, Brendan. Looking for you."

"Like hell." Brendan's scarred, heavy features showed his contempt. "Get out of here before you're kicked ashore."

Welch grinned excitedly. Brendan noted the glassy eyes, the pinpoint pupils. He remembered that he himself was practically helpless while encased in this diving-suit.



Brendan's mind seemed unable to function; he could think only of Hughie. . . . "O. K.!" he growled to the tender, and clumped down the iron ladder.

"No time to gam." Welch spoke rapidly. "Gunboat, I got a five-thousand-dollar diving-job for you."

Brendan grunted a disdainful laugh. "I don't do commercial diving, Runt. Right now, I'm doing a civilian diver out o' fifty bucks by hooking to this car. Aint fair, maybe, but orders is orders. I hear tell this may be the police wagon stolen after that hold-up job tonight."

"So it is," said Welch, his eyes a gleam.

"Huh? If you know it is, run along and tell the cops."

"I'm telling you," snapped Welch. "I drove that car, see? I was in it. Me and Denver Red. All the others got burned. Then Denver, he got burned on the way when a cop let go at us as we passed him. I come down through the fog, missed the turn and went off the pier. Swum clear to a boat I got waiting,

changed my rags, and here I am. Fast work!"

Brendan's blue eyes were wide.

"My God, if you aint all doped up! Why, you blasted little cockroach—"

"Save it, you big stiff," spat out Welch.

"I got to talk fast. Twenty thousand bucks in a suitcase, see? Pay-roll made up at the bank; we copped it, sure. It's under the back seat o' that car, Gunboat. When you go down to hook on to the car, you slip out the suitcase and carry it over to one of the pilings; anchor it. You and me—we'll get it tomorrow night with my boat. Five grand goes to you."

Brendan still stared in blank amazement. He knew a dope-fiend when he saw one, and the Runt was obviously all hopped up. The thing was incredible.

"Are you off your nut?" Brendan scowled suddenly. "A cheap rat like you in on a hold-up? Not likely. Chase yourself!"

"Dry up," snapped Welch, leaning forward intently. "Listen here. Denver Red aint been mugged or printed. He aint got a record, see?"

"What's it to me?" snarled Brendan angrily. "Get out of here! You and your orders to me—I don't know if you're crazy or what."

"You'll know damned quick," shot out the other. "I know who Denver Red was, see? And you're doing just what I tell you, Gunboat. You get that suitcase out; then you get Denver out and anchor him too. Then we're all set. Yeah, Denver has told me a lot about you, and about Mother Brendan too."

Brendan took the pipe from his mouth and set it down. He tried to speak and could not. His massive features were suddenly gray, as comprehension came to him. Welch, at these evidences of agitation, uttered a jeering laugh.

"Got the idea, have you? Hughie Brendan—that's him, all right. Your kid brother. And if they pull him up in that car, it's good night! You know what'll happen, what it'll mean, when the story breaks in the papers. It'll dish you and your record. It'll dish her, too. Denver thought a lot o' Mother Brendan, he sure did! Now, you big stiff, you'll do what I tell you. I'll give you a ring later tonight. So behave."

He cocked his head, listening; then suddenly rose, darted out into the fog, and was gone. He had heard some one coming on the run.

Brendan sat there in stark misery, sick of heart and soul, his scarred features agonized, his huge fists clenched, his breath coming fast. Hughie, gone to the bad these two years, vanished, lost! And all the while, Mother Brendan had prayed for him every night and morning, certain he would come back. Well, if this rat spoke truth, he had come back!

IT was not of himself or his record that Bill thought; this mattered little. It was of Mother Brendan, and what the story would mean to her.

Probably it was not over thirty seconds that he sat thus; yet his brain moved in the span of days and years. Hughie, for one thing; all the ruined wastrel life of the young fellow. And what this news would mean to the old mother. No pleasant prospect.... Then too there was Welch. The rat's words had unrolled an entire panorama.

A boat waiting here somewhere in the harbor, close by. The pay-roll made up

at the bank—yes, all that had come in over the radio broadcast—and Welch acting as driver, probably in charge of the waiting boat and the get-away. Three of the gang shot down. Two away in the stolen police-car, and one of them killed on the mad drive. Welch, going off the dead end in the fog—and below, Hughie Brendan waiting for his brother.

"Come on, Gunboat!" Voices at the door, hasty, excited, jarred through him. "Got to go down. Car's there, but Howard cut his hand on broken glass and didn't get inside. The cops think it may be their car, the one the bandits made a get-away with; probably one or two of 'em are inside now."

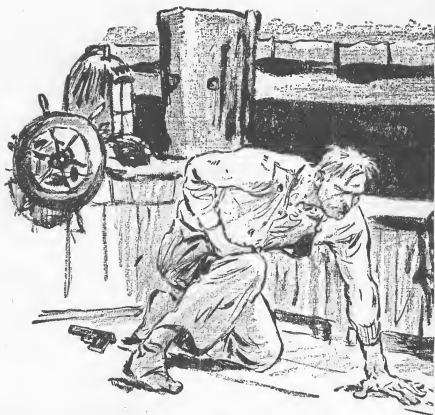
AGONY, terror, acute horror swept through Gunboat Brendan. Even to move seemed rankly impossible, for his brain was frozen; yet he found himself mechanically rising. Two firemen helped him from the nozzle-room across the deck to another stool. Without a word, he sat while his heavy shoes were laced on.

One of the men was cursing softly; something about volunteer firemen-divers who got no extra pay or merit-marks for going into black depths foul with sunken timbers, cast-off wire hawsers, saw-edged boiler iron and whatnot. Any other time Brendan would have added a curse or two on his own account; but now his mind seemed unable to function. He could only think of Hughie, who had come home again. It was paralyzing.

Lead shoes, lead belt, copper breast-plate, then the telephone receivers over his ears. He tested the phones. The helmet was lowered over his head, given a quarter-turn and locked into position. He peered through the glass faceplate, tried his air-valve, tested the exhaust valve, felt for his knife, the wrench, the hanks of light line in his belt; all this done swiftly, automatically.

"O. K.!" he growled to the tender, and clumped down the iron ladder.

No one could tell, thanks to the helmet, that his face was gray and drawn, that his eyes bulged with acute terror behind the thick glass. Had Runt Welch told the truth? There was one way he could be certain. If a suitcase was under the back seat of that car down below, he might be sure the story was true. All sense of sight was ruled out, in the depths. He could see nothing. But the pay-roll suitcase, the same one described in the police radio broadcast, was all the proof he needed.



Groping, Brendan found the car; the touch of it balanced him, heartened him with reality. Here he must work entirely by feel. He got the doors open. He touched the Thing so limply awaiting him, and a sweat of horror bedewed his scarred features. The suitcase was there. The story was true. This limp clay aswing in the water was his brother.

Satisfied of this, he rallied; he knew the worst. Waist-deep in the ooze, he hauled Hughie out. As he lugged the swinging body through the blackness, he could feel the tears on his cheeks. The air hissing through the intake-valve seemed to choke him as he plowed along. Now there was only one thing he could do, and not for his own sake but for that of Mother Brendan. He went grimly ahead with the gruesome, soul-rending job.

For a hundred feet along the wharf, creosoted piling was thrust down into the sand and mud. From his belt Brendan unhooked the light line, cutting off a length with his knife; and by means of this he anchored Hughie to the piling.

He groped his way back to the car and got the heavy suitcase. Back to the piling again; presently he had the suitcase anchored there too. If anything slipped up now, if for any reason a diver came down here tomorrow, he knew full well

the implications, and what it would mean to him; but the knowledge did not stagger him. Then he was back at the car again, speaking through the helmet transmitter.

"O. K.! Send down the hook-rope," he told the tender up above. His voice sounded heavy, hoarse. "Ready to send her up. Tell the Chief I've searched the car. Nothing inside except the rear seat cushion floating. No bodies."

When the rope came down and he hooked on, the job was done.

WHEN they brought Brendan up, he leaned heavily on the rail while the tenders unlocked and lifted off the helmet. One look at him, and Duke Dumas spoke anxiously.

"You look sick, big boy. What's wrong?"

"I'm a bit off. Must have been something I ate for supper," Brendan replied. "Give me a hand over the rail."

They helped him to the deck, stripped off the clammy suit, wrapped him in blankets and gave him a slug of brandy. He had the shivers, sure enough; they hustled him into Fireboat Three and sent him back to quarters.

After that, Fireboat Two lifted the sunken car with her winch, the eager reporters and police finding it empty.



"I'll get everything and send it to the boat, aye," he said. "You've marked the piles, you say? All right, you can depend on me. Will there be fog tomorrow night, you say? Sure. Every night for a week, now."

So it was settled.

NEXT evening, fog was again rolling in past the Point. The battleships inside the breakwater were sounding "At anchor" signals, and the giant bell that some authority had placed near Fireboat Two's berth was tolling its nerve-shattering warning, its voice fairly shaking the quarters of the boat crew. There would be no sleep for the boys this night.

Gunboat Brendan, on his regular off shift, was ready for the dreaded job. Near midnight, a little fishing-boat left its moorings at the landing near the yacht club, and cautiously felt its way down the

Brendan grunted: "I didn't go to do that, confound it! No help for it now, though. And no harm done the world, either!"

Then, her work done, the boat went hooting back through the fog to her Terminal Island station.

Brendan was still off his feed when the chief looked in on him, so they bundled him into a car and sent him home. For him, home was the Wilmington bungalow where he lived with Mother Brendan.

Half an hour after he got there, the phone rang. Brendan answered the call. At sound of Welch's thin and squeaky voice, he shivered again and felt sweat on his face.

"Aye," he said grimly. "Everything done. Tomorrow night? It's my shift off; yes."

He listened. Welch had the boat made ready for the gang; he, the sole survivor, was now heir to all their preparations. He, out of all those five men, alone was living. And Gunboat Brendan knew that he himself must now depend on this cheap crook, this contemptible scoundrel of the waterfront.

channel to Slip Five. In the boat lay a helmet and oxygen jacket Brendan had bought that day from "Suicide" Svenson's widow. Svenson had lost his life going after a fouled dredge anchor off the new breakwater extension. Brendan figured he could use the outfit himself, later.

"Did you read about the job in the papers?" Brendan asked.

Welch grunted.

"Sure thing. Lucky they blasted them three mugs good and proper; nobody's left to squeal about me and your brother. Somebody had tipped off the cops and they were all set for the mob."

"Who did the talking?" Brendan inquired and the other swore viciously.

"I dunno. Monk Hawley had a moll. I dope it that she was sore on him and phoned in a tip to the cops. Can't tell."

Brendan sensed suspicion, defiance, distrust, in the manner of Welch, who pointedly kept him beyond arm's reach. He accepted the situation without argument,

intent solely upon what now lay ahead. A man is what his background makes him; Brendan's one and only thought at the moment was back in the bungalow where, this same night, Mother Brendan prayed for the return of Hughie.

THE fishing-boat crept into Slip Five, with Brendan forward and Welch at the helm. She made fast to the piling where Fireboat Two had lain the previous night. Not a soul moved on the pier, no ship or tug navigated the fog-bound channel. Welch was a long time in finding the particular piles he had marked the night before, but at last he found them, and came down the ladder from the dock platform.

"All set. The watchman's asleep in his doghouse, as usual. We're O. K., if some other darn' fool don't come along and run his car off. Ready?"

"Yeah," grunted Brendan. He sent down a shot line to the bottom. Hughie would be there, within a few feet of it. Then he got out the diving jacket and helmet.

"Now, listen," he said. "It aint so hot working in one of these gadgets at forty feet. If I get fouled, down there, I'm liable to stay with Hughie. You handle your end of the job right, or we're all sunk together."

"Shoot, and don't waste time," said Welch impatiently. "This fog is cold as hell."

"So's the water down below," Brendan countered grimly. Even in the fog and dark, he suspected from Welch's position that the smaller man was holding a pistol. "First, I'll get up my brother's body. Then, after the suitcase comes up, I want to use this boat. I'll go out while the fog's heavy and bury Hughie in deep water off the Point."

"Sure, sure, you can have the damned boat, and five grand besides," snarled Welch. He did not move from where he stood. "Get on with the job."

Brendan indicated the shot line. "See this line? I go down on it, taking the heaving line with me. You hang on to the heaving line from topside. Better come forward and take it now, and keep it running free. In the cockpit it's apt to get fouled."

As he spoke, he flaked out the heaving line on the little fo'c'sle. It was dark up forward; the fog was thicker than ever, swirling around him, distorting his figure out of all proportion. The deck was wet and slippery, filmed with fish oil and the grease of years.

Welch peered at him intently but did not move.

"I'm staying here till you go down," he rejoined decisively. His hand jerked up a bit; Brendan was certain now that he held a gun. "Don't you try to pull nothing on me, Gunboat. I aint trusting you a whole lot."

"Oh, don't be a damned fool—"

Brendan swung around. His feet slipped and went out from under him. He fell with a crash, half against the little wheel-house. A groan escaped him, as he lay in a twisted heap. Welch's voice shrilled with alarm.

"Hey! What's the matter with you?"

Brendan moved, tried to claw himself up, and fell back with a subdued oath.

"Can't make it. Can't get up. Must have twisted my back. Come here and give me a hand, you rat!"

Welch cursed softly, viciously. "You big lummox, to go hurt yourself at a time like this! You're pulling something. I got a mind to blast you right now."

"And bring everybody down on us? You're no such fool." Brendan laughed harshly. "Why you damned cokehead, I'm just as anxious as you are to get this done! My kid brother's down there with the crabs eating on him. I can't get him buried without your help, and you know it. Come on, damn you, give me a hand!"

"I guess you're right," Welch moved forward, reluctantly. "Where you hurt?"

"It's my back. Jammed against the wheel-house, here; I can't seem to get on my feet." Brendan twisted again, and once more relaxed with a low gasp. "Confound it all! If I could just get up on my legs, I'd be all right. This deck's an inch thick with slime. Come on, get your hands under my shoulders and lift, will you? I'm stuck here."

HIS suspicion dissipated, Welch came and stood over the big, helpless figure. He leaned down, got his hands under Brendan's arms, and pulled. Brendan groaned.

"It hurts, but it helps. Get a better grip, now, and we'll make it."

Welch obeyed. His hands well under Brendan's arms, he stooped to tug upward.

Of a sudden, Brendan's arms clamped in with tremendous pressure, pinioning Welch's wrists. A sharp yelp broke from Welch. He lost balance. The gun escaped his fingers. He clutched frantically at Brendan—and yelped again as he fell.

HARBOR HAZARD

The two figures thrashed confusedly about the little deck, under a swirl of thick fog. Twice more little convulsive yelps broke from Welch, like the squeaks of a cornered rat. Then came a subdued, thudding crash. . . . Presently Brendan scrambled to his feet.

NO alarm. The sleeping watchman had heard nothing. The little boat rocked quietly under the fog. Brendan stooped to feel the limp figure at his feet, and grunted.

"I didn't go to do that, confound it! No help for it now, though. If his neck broke, he deserved it a dozen times over. And no harm done the world, either."

He turned calmly to the equipment. He laced on the heavy lead shoes and donned the diving jacket and helmet; this light, shallow-water equipment would do in such a pinch. He made his preparations with unhurried care. Gunboat Brendan always took one thing at a time and made sure it was right before going ahead. No more need to worry about Runt Welch, at least. Now to keep the rendezvous with Hughie; no earthly pay would have tempted him to undertake what he was about to do for love. * Gingerly, he lowered himself down the knotted shot line into the oily water. Never had his huge gnarled paws stood him in better stead than on this night, or done grimmer work. Once in the blackness, acute fear struck him. Never before had he gone down without tenders watching above. Now, if the least thing went wrong in the gripping ooze, he was lost.

Better so, however, than with Runt Welch waiting to kill him, after the suitcase was recovered. He had cherished no illusions regarding that man's intent.

Even in this moment of gnawing revulsion and fear, he could not repress a grim smile that curled his battered lips like a snarl, and a twisted thought that came into his brain slantwise. Once he had heard a frenetic soapbox orator blaspheming about "God's jokes." The phrase crept upon his mind. God's jokes! Well, this was one, and no mistake. If only Runt Welch had known the truth!

His outstretched hands came upon the floating, anchored Thing, and he shivered. . . .

When he had made fast his lines to corpse and suitcase, he went back topside with the hiss of the oxygen fretting his senses. No tenders, no helpers over the

side. Swirls of fog blacker than ever. He might have cast off his heavy weighted shoes, but Brendan was a practical man, and this equipment had value. He felt his way up the line; those big knotted hands of his accomplished the impossible.

At length, trembling with exhaustion, he was aboard. He rid himself of the outfit and lay gathering his forces. Then he rose on the slippery deck and fell to work. The worst of it was over, anyhow.

He brought in the stiff, streaming figure and the suitcase, all its seals intact. From the fo'c'sle of the boat he dragged some old canvas. Impartially, he swathed Welch and the other in this canvas. Before finishing, he secured Welch's flashlight and stole just one glimpse of the face from the depths. The recognition of Hughie steeled him to all he had done and still must do.

He bound the two wrapped bodies around and around with lobster-pot lines.

At Hughie's feet he secured the boat's anchor. Then he lifted the slippery suitcase into the wheel-house, took out his diving-knife, and slit one side of the wet leather. He felt inside and brought out a number of pieces of metal, and flashed the light on them.

"Washers! Washers and junk!" he muttered grimly. "Those cops around the boat, last night, sure told the truth. Lucky thing it never got into the newspapers, or Welch would have seen about it. A decoy suitcase! The holdup had been tipped off, of course. A decoy suitcase, and five men dead because of it! Oh, Hughie boy—"

He checked back his threatening emotion. Lugging the suitcase out again, he made it fast to the limp bundle that was Runt Welch. One of God's jokes, sure enough, he told himself.

Then, starting the motor, he cast off.

AT the entrance of Slip Five, he took his departure from Beacon Eight and headed down the main channel toward the Point. He passed Fireboat Two. The B-platoon boys would be playing cards down below, he knew, trying to dull their senses to the damning toll of the giant fog-bell so close beside. That bell dinned its unending solemn dirge as he thrummed past and away into the fog, heading for Barracuda Flats and the two-hundred-fathom depth that would close the story.

And Mother Brendan would go on with her prayers, in blessed ignorance.

Another story in this fine new series will appear in an early issue.

The Christian

This sixth of these sagas of strange escape deals with an Englishman held captive by the Moors, and with the unforeseen possibility that changed the world for him.



Illustrated by L. F. Grant

FOR days, now, Cotterel had been glooming in the cell, the shop, the yard, scarcely speaking, regarding all around him with eyes of sullen suspicion. At last Manning, his cellmate, ventured a kindly inquiry.

"Leave me alone!" Cotterel burst out. "Keep to yourself. Keep your nose out of my affairs. I'm through with you, understand? I'm applying to the Warden tomorrow to change my cell, and that settles it. I'm tired of your eternal advice."

Old Manning, in for life like Cotterel, regarded the younger man with no responding heat in his wise, gentle eyes.

This was the first savage break in their friendship. In all these months, they had occupied the same cell; repeatedly had Manning, in his shrewd knowledge of prison life, intervened to save Cotterel from impulsive folly.

Now he recognized the symptoms. Old Manning knew this to be the softest stir in the country; but behind the velvet glove was a hand of iron. He himself was deserving of all he got. Cotterel, on the other hand, was in for a crime he had not committed; Manning felt this to be true, and sympathized. He could understand Cotterel's wild beating at the bars. But—change cells, end their friendship? This was different.

He studied the haggard features, the desperate eyes, the clenched lips, of Cot-

terel. Between the two had grown up a strong and real friendship. Manning liked his companion rarely; himself a lonely old man, an artist who had gone wrong, he had given himself without stint to Cotterel, and until now had been repaid in kind. Yet, even now, he saw that this surly, suspicious, snapping mood had something else behind it and was not natural. Prison-wise as he was, knowing Cotterel and others in this hell on earth, he could guess at the truth.

"So," he said in his silent, deft way, "you're figuring on a break again."

"None of your business," snapped Cotterel. "Why in hell don't you keep to yourself? I'm done with you and your blasted smooth talk. Every time something turns up, you argue me out of it. Suds Jackson got away two weeks ago. I'd have been with him now if you hadn't stuck your oar in. Shut up! To hell with you!"

Manning ignored the savage glare, the acid words. His affection for the younger man was too precious a thing to be so dismissed. This was not the first time Cotterel had been close to the lunatic fringe.

"If Suds Jackson could do it, you can do it, eh?" he observed.

"Shut up!" blurted Cotterel angrily.

Manning persisted. At the moment, there was no bar to their talking. There was no bar at any time, for that matter.

Slave

By GORDON
KEYNE

Old Manning had not uttered a word aloud for years. He was dumb.

His fingers spoke for him. Those deft, nimble fingers, so apt at sketching or engraving, had put him behind the bars. During the months of companionship, Cotterel had learned the finger-talk. He did not have to use it himself unless he liked, for Manning was not deaf; but it gave them relief from the rule of silence that was clamped down now and again.

"Suppose Suds Jackson had been shot making the break?" he said. "And you with him?"

"Better be shot than here for life," rejoined Cotterel.

Ah! This was better. At least the ice was broken, Cotterel was willing to talk. Manning's fingers flew again, and the sullen gaze of Cotterel was not averted.

"A curious thing," Manning went on calmly. "Very curious. There's a possibility that certainly has never occurred to Suds Jackson, and it has never occurred to you; it never would occur—"

"I'm not interested," broke in Cotterel. "Lay off, I tell you! To hell with you and your possibilities. I know 'em all."

"Not this one; yet it's perhaps the greatest and most powerful of all. The possibility unseen and invisible, the one thing that you wouldn't think of, Cotterel. I'm not interfering with anything you want to do. I agree that death would be a blessed release from this place; I'd take a bullet myself for one day of freedom, just like Forbes. And yet you can't afford to neglect the one thing he neglected, the one possibility that's never foreseen, the thought that never occurred to him."

COTTEREL lifted sultry eyes. "I'm neglecting nothing. If you've got anything to say, spit it out and get it over. You're not going to argue me out of what I mean to do. Who's Forbes?"

Manning smiled, a whimsical touch in his face.



"Argue? Not a bit of it. I merely want to give you every possible weapon, make sure you neglect nothing. And this is something you've certainly neglected. Suds Jackson neglected it."

Cotterel scowled. "What are you talking about? Suds Jackson got clear. And if it wasn't for you, I'd be with him right now. Free!"

Manning nodded. More sensitive than most, the prison grapevine brought him odd bits of information that others missed. Only this afternoon, he had heard something, and he was expecting momentary confirmation. At least, it would serve him now as a basis on which to cast the dice. For he must gamble, if he were to save Cotterel—and himself.

He did not blink the fact that he had a selfish interest in this friendship. It

made this prison life at least endurable, gave him something rare and precious for which to live and exist. It was very close now to being broken asunder in Cotterel's desperate agony of soul.

"Don't be like Forbes," he said. Cotterel snarled an oath.

"And who's Forbes?"

"Archibald Forbes. A Scot, a young fellow like you. If you want me to tell you what's in my mind, you must let me do it my own way, Cotterel. I can't make you see the importance of this unseen possibility, unless you agree. And it's vitally important to you, if you aim to get away."

Cotterel gave him a sulky stare.

"All right. I know there's a catch in it, but go ahead. It won't have any effect. I'm bound to get out, and I'm certain about everything, and I don't give a damn if I do get a bullet."

Manning laughed, in his silent way.

"That sounds like Forbes. He was a prisoner in Meknes, the capital of Morocco, when that country was a real empire, at the close of the seventeenth century. The emperor, Ismail, was probably the most despotic monarch the world ever knew. He set up the doctrine that Morocco and everything and everyone in it was all his absolute personal property. He got away with it."

"Why?" demanded Cotterel as the other paused.

Manning gave no sign that this indication of interest delighted his heart.

"Because he was both cruel and smart. So cruel, that everyone stood in deathly fear of him; it was calculated that in the course of his life he had killed twenty-five thousand people with his own hand. So smart, nobody could outwit him. And personally so brave and able that none of his bravest men, singly or in crowds, could stand against him with any weapon. He was a phenomenon."

"SOUNDS like it," grunted Cotterel. "Wasn't he the guy who had a lot of Christian slaves?"

"About thirty thousand—and Forbes was one of them. Ismail used those slaves, and his own people as well, to build the immense walls of Meknes; incredible walls, defenses, palaces. He had fifty palaces, five hundred wives, and around a thousand sons—the daughters were strangled at birth. However, let's stick to Forbes."

"He was a Scots seaman, taken aboard some ship the Sallée Rovers brought in,

and like all other Christian captives, was sent as a slave to Meknes. We know every detail of his story, of his marvelous escape. Ismail never freed any slaves until they were too worn out for further work; then he'd let the Redemptionist Fathers ransom them. These fathers were allowed to live in Meknes, and gave their lives to the redemption of Christian captives from among the Moors. They've left us the story of Forbes."

"He was one of those wiry men, not bulging with muscle, but of superhuman ability to endure. Such men accomplish the impossible."

Manning paused; then his flying fingers went on with the astonishing story of Forbes, enclosed in such a prison as the world has seldom known—a prison, such as Russia or Germany today affords, in which the prison consists of the entire country.

FORBES was intelligent, shrewd, able. He spent a couple of years in this living hell, before reaching the point where he chose death rather than more of it; he must escape or go under, and death would be welcome release. For a time he worked around the menagerie maintained by the Emperor Ismail. The palace grounds, surrounded by a triple wall, were of incredible size—the stable alone contained a thousand horses. Ismail had a huge menagerie, and did not hesitate to fight with the wild beasts himself. He thought nothing of throwing a slave to the lions, or a soldier, or one of his courtiers. One day he threw Forbes to them, but the lions knew him and left him alone. So Ismail put him on the hard-labor gang, the building gang. And with this, Forbes knew he was a goner, and determined to escape or die.

The daily life facing him was beyond description; that any man could survive under such conditions was past belief. Yet a standing force of some thirty thousand Christians, and as many Berbers and Arabs, was maintained. The slave quarters in Meknes consisted of vast chambers, partly underground, where the slaves were huddled like wild beasts in filth and rags, after it was too dark to work. Here they were herded by a regular night guard, a burly Andalusian Moor, who beat or tortured them at will. With earliest dawn, they were again taken out in stumbling hordes to the labor.

The building operations, of which Ismail himself was architect and chief overseer, were simple. The enormous,

massive walls ran for uncounted miles. They consisted of a mastic, a mixture of sand with limestone and gravel, pounded down between forms of timber. When a slave was killed or died, he was pounded into the walls with the mastic. The walls of Meknes today are filled with Christian bones. . . .

The food was starvation diet. The work was severe. Berbers and Arabs, criminals or rebellious subjects, were mingled with the Christians, for Ismail, himself a black, ruled with black Sudanese soldiers and ground down the Arabs beyond any rebellion. His was a throne of blood, ruled with sharp steel.

At all times the labor was pressed, but especially when Ismail appeared. If it did not go to his liking, he used sword and spear in a passionate frenzy; he was mad with the desire to build more walls. He cut down slave, soldier, noble or prime minister alike. In more humane moments, his chief feat of prowess was to mount his horse, and in the same flowing motion behead the man who held his stirrup; he was equally capable of fighting an enraged lion, armed only with his sword.

He prodded the hapless slaves to superhuman exertions. They died like flies; more came in every day to replace them, from ships captured by the Barbary rovers. Spanish, English, French, Italian—all nations mingled here in a hell of sweating death.

Forbes resolved to escape.

His red hair and blue eyes were not against him; Morocco was full of Berbers with similar complexions. He was hard as nails, emaciated, hairy, powerful. Soon he would lose strength and courage and hope, like some of them who had been here twenty and thirty years; now was the time, if ever. He spoke Arabic with moderate fluency.

Escape by day was simply unthinkable; evasion by night was the only way, but escape was utterly impossible. He knew it well enough. Many a man had tried. Here were two Spaniards who had tried, hard, vigorous men; now they labored in chains, after having been beaten and tortured out of human semblance.

Forbes weighed the chances coolly. With luck, he might do it. Without, not.

The night guard, the jail doors—the first step. Once out of this prison, he would be in the city, in Meknes, gates closed and walls patrolled. Once out of Meknes, he would have the olive or-



"Well, dog? Tell me the plot quickly. . . . What is their plan?"

chards of the valley—and beyond those, desert and mountain. To reach the sea-coast, across those leagues of stony desert and savage mountain, where he would be hunted day and night, where every man's hand would be against him with fanatic religious hatred, where he could find no food and little water, was an appalling gamble.

And when he reached the sea-coast, he would find only Moors. Ismail had driven all the Christian powers out of Morocco; the Spaniards alone held footing at Ceuta. Their other places had fallen. The Portuguese had been driven out. The English had been driven out of Tangier. Ismail, all but supreme in conquest of the Christian, had decreed that Morocco should wear only yellow slippers henceforth, as a token of rejoicing. They are still universally worn today, though the reason is forgotten by the wearers.

THAT the obstacles were insuperable, Forbes knew; he accepted them. There was only one thing he did not anticipate—the one thing no prisoner thinks about when contemplating escape.

This one thing never occurred to him. It never occurs to anyone, until too late. What was it? Wait!

In this land of blood, where death was at one's elbow day and night, where heads were piled by the thousand in the marketplace after every campaign, Forbes



"Out of the way!"
snarled the Moor.
His whip slashed.
Forbes laughed—
laughed as his
knife flashed.

was well aware that except by spilling blood, he could not escape. In fact, he had a few scores he was only too anxious to pay off in Moorish blood.

He had watched the emperor closely. He knew Ismail was no madman, as some called him, but a very deep and crafty fellow, aiming to hold by fear a throne that had destroyed its occupants hitherto very quickly. And from this, Forbes got his prime idea. Others had tried to escape by stealth, by hiding, by slippery evasion. He would eschew all these things.

In this land of blood, he would do what no one else had done—escape by blood. So, having weighed every detail, Forbes awaited his chance. It was the rainy season, and he wanted a night of rain. . . .

It came. A thin, fine drizzle of rain, when Moors were huddled to the very eyes in the hoods of their jellabs. Ismail had come out to speed the work that day; he had killed two overseers, had ordered a chief overseer drawn through the city at the tail of a horse and then impaled, and had ordered that a double portion of work be finished on the morrow. The prison was filled with groans and lamentations; the morrow would see wretched backs red with whip-strokes.

Forbes slept. A little past midnight, he wakened. The burly Andalusian, jingling his bunch of keys, was passing among the huddled sleepers, amusing himself by kicking one and another.

Forbes beckoned him, and he came, grinning.

"Well, dog of an Englishman! What is it?"

"Quiet!" murmured Forbes, with a cautious look around. "If I tell you of a plot to escape, is there a reward?"

"Aye, by Allah!" The other grinned again. "Who?"

"I can't tell you here. They'd kill me! Take me outside with you."

The Andalusian launched a kick at him, and emitted a roar.

"Up, dog, up! Come with me. I have a pleasant little task for you—it's time the latrines were cleaned. Come on, come on!"

With a simulated groan, Forbes rose and followed. The Andalusian had his home in a room at the prison gate, where he could call guards if necessary. They were seldom needed, so broken and worn in body and spirit were these slaves.

IN this hovel of his own, where a lamp burned dimly, the Andalusian turned. Forbes had seen into this room twice a day, morning and evening; he knew everything in it, knew exactly what he would do on this occasion. He came in and closed the door.

"Well, dog? Tell me the plot, quickly. Who is in it?"

"The three Spaniards who came last week," said Forbes, crossing to the farther wall where a stout bar of oak leaned in a corner.

"By Allah and Allah!" exclaimed the keeper. "What is their plan?"

The only reply of Forbes was to catch up the oak bar, whirl it, and strike. The blow cut short the alarm-shout of the Andalusian; and the burly man collapsed, with his skull shattered.

Forbes listened; the closed door, the rain, had silenced the cry. There was no alarm. Now, unhurriedly he went about his business.

FIRST, he ate. Food was here, and water; he filled himself for the first time in over two years. Cold *couscous*, dates, bread, he made into small packets and laid aside. He hacked off his long, matted hair and shaved his skull, Moorish fashion, leaving only the one lock of hair by which the angel would presumably carry him to Paradise. He trimmed his beard roughly, and then dressed himself in what clothes he could find here—baggy linen trousers, a dirty white robe, and over all an old brown jellab. On his horny naked feet he put the yellow slippers of the keeper.

Around his neck he slung the long curved knife taken from the dead man. He found a little money, a few coins of copper and silver, which he took gladly. Then, aware that earliest dawn would find him the object of a frenzied and determined search, he took the keys, opened the main doors, and slipped out into the street. The drizzle of rain kept any guards close. Hood pulled over head, he shuffled along the streets of pounded earth, until he found the place he sought—a dim light coming from behind screens, at a doorway that was never closed.

This was the Grand Mesjid, or Mosque as the French called it, on the market square. No Christian had ever been inside it, but Forbes had picked up bountiful knowledge.

He turned in at the entrance. The doorkeeper was snoring blissfully; leaving his slippers, now mud-splashed past recognition, beside the sleeper, Forbes made for the courtyard of ablutions. Here he was alone, with a dim-burning lamp. Stripping, he enjoyed the luxury of a thorough wash at the huge basin of living water. This was not only a luxury, but a necessity. The slave-odor was an identifying thing, stronger even than the stench which clung to the open-sewer streets of every Arab town. Once rid of this odor—and at no other time of the day or night could he have thus

rid himself of it—he could breathe more easily, both literally and figuratively.

Veiled once more in his damp jellab, he turned his steps toward the interior of the mosque. Here, upon a corner of one of the great carpets, he sank down with a sigh of relief, freed himself of the jellab, and made a number of prostrations toward the *mihrab*, the niche that faced toward Mecca, in the Moslem manner; it was merely a precaution in case he had attracted any attention.

This vast interior was not empty. Lamps lit the gorgeous tiles of the walls, the curious Arabic inscriptions, the lacy carved and painted plaster-work, the carved and painted beams, the screens here and there. Dim figures were sprawled here and there, some in slumber, others in meditation. A furiously dirty holy man from some marabout outside the city, naked except for loin-cloth and shaggy hair, leaned against a pillar and mechanically murmured Koranic verses. Occasional snores sounded.

As Forbes knew, to these people a mosque was more than a place to which men came for prayer at the appointed hours. It was a place for gossip and meeting, for meditation, for rest and study and enjoyment of beauty; it was an escape from the world of blood and death around. For him, it was safety.

No one would dream of looking for him here—where, if discovered, he would be torn to shreds by the hands of enraged fanatics. He needed no jellab to hide him; his shaven skull with its top-knot was the mark of a Moslem, and no one would give him even a passing second glance. That naked holy man by the pillar had the shaggy red hair of a Berber, even redder than Forbes' own.

Leaning against the wall, Forbes slept.

A CLAMOR of voices startled him wide awake; someone in passing gave him a kick, a friendly admonition. It was the moment of early morning prayer; the quavering voice of the blind muezzin came faintly from the high minaret above, though flags frequently took the place of muezzins, in Morocco. Men were trooping in all around.

Forbes did not know the prayers; he did not need to know them, so long as there was no suspicion aroused. He prostrated himself as the others did; he moved his lips as he rose from each bow, and amid the babel of voices his own was not missed. Someone, during the night, had left a rosary of black beads in the

corner near-by. Forbes appropriated it, leaned back against the wall, dropped his beard on his breast and closed his eyes, and sat fingering the rosary in presumed meditation like many another.

Even now, he knew, the search was on. Gossip around him confirmed this.

"El Andalous with his head bashed in—by Allah, a blow! The Christian dog got away, but they'll find him. The city is being searched. He's hiding in the palace grounds, they say."

The hours passed. As each prayer-hour came, Forbes went through the ritual; it was beginning to get on his nerves, but he squelched down the gusty fear and forced himself to it. All around, men came in, talked business, ate, gossiped, prayed. Forbes ate, also; he listened, slept, clutched the rosary ostentatiously, gave himself up to delicious rest.

THE long day droned through its length. At last came the prayer of sunset; as the crowd flooded out, Forbes mingled with it, hood over head. He got his mud-splashed slippers at the entrance and passed out into the street.

Shuffling along the narrow, twisting ways, he stopped at a baker's booth, bought more bread, stopped at another booth and bought dried dates. He was near the Mellah now, the quarter of the Jews, the ghetto near the gates; another mosque was here, and he entered it boldly enough.

All night he remained here, and in the morning, after the sunrise prayer, took up anew his challenge to destiny. Thus far, his scheme had succeeded admirably; now to leave the city.

Here he had picked his time, and his place, very shrewdly. Outside these walls was the animal market, where for a swarming mile the yellow ground was thronged with asses, horses, camels, with buyers from the city, with country-folk and lean Berbers from the hills. Further, it was Friday, the one day when all the native women poured forth to the cemeteries on the hillsides.

Forbes had reckoned aright, and joined the throng seeking egress. The day was fair and sunny; already the dust rose in thick shimmering clouds. The stalwart black Sudanese troops of Ismail, the blacks whom he bred like animals and educated from earliest youth to savage soldiering, paid little heed as the gabbling crowds flowed past. Behind him, Forbes beheld the high massive towers and walls fall away. He was free!

The fact gave him no elation; he was tensed to meet the perils ahead. He still had a little money left, and food was now the first thing to settle. First food, then transport.

HE made his way along the dusty lanes of the animal market, unhurried, stopping now and again to buy more food and eat it, or stow it safely away. Action was drawing close upon him, as he knew well; when the moment came, he must strike hard and without mercy, but he must choose the moment aright or lose everything.

The heat of the day came on, and found him a little way out of the throngs and dust, resting beneath an olive tree, watching with hawk gaze the yellowish highway that wound away from the city and the market through the olive valleys. Into Meknes poured the endless groups of wagons and animals bearing building materials, levied from all parts of the empire; bands of slaves trudging along, parties of soldiers. Country-folk eased away from the markets of the city.

Presently, in the hot lull of noon, Forbes saw that his moment was come. To his left, the road dipped, beyond sight of the animal market; that was why he had chosen this spot. Coming from the market to his right, heaped high on the rump of his ass in the native style, was a man. A man of some importance, to judge from his snowy robes; no doubt some town gentleman going out to his country estate or his olive orchard.

Forbes rose and strode on down into the dip, and waited. The proud Moor came along on the sturdily trotting little animal, and Forbes turned with a whine.

"Alms, *sidi*! Alms, in the name of Allah!"

"Go ask of Allah, for he's richer than I am," snarled the Moor. "Out of the way!"

His whip slashed down, across the face of Forbes. And Forbes laughed—laughed as he sprang, as his knife flashed, as the Moor died.

Tugging the body aside among the trees, he stripped it, found money and took that, came back to the ass, and mounted. Sitting a-crupper like the natives, clad now in the snow-white jellab of fine wool, he pulled the hood about his head to keep out the sun, and fled.

Another barrier was past. There remained the leagues of desert, the snowy Atlas mountains, the sea-coast beyond.



The Sicilian ran in, with drawn sword. Out of the dust and blood rose Forbes, hurling his pistol into the dark face.

Mile after mile the little animal put behind at its speedy trot. The sun was at the horizon when Forbes, heading his makeshift mount down into a steep gully, still following the dusty track of the road perforce, came slap upon a dozen of Ismail's black soldiers, horsemen, escorting a wagon laden with tribute grain.

He scuttled past with a muttered greeting. Forbes knew very well that he could not hope to pass for a native at close quarters, though his knowledge of the language was enough to serve in a pinch. He saw the eyes of the blacks roll enviously as he passed. This sleek ass, though nearly worthless in the open country, was a valuable piece of property in the city, and the soldiers were heading for Meknes.

One of them turned his horse, with a laugh, and struck back down the gully.

FORBES heard the horseman following him as he reached the trickling stream at the bottom; he heard the order to halt, and obeyed it. Dismounting, he stood silent as the horseman reined in, with a flood of negroid Arabic. Forbes could not understand the words at all,

but he understood that this black was taking the ass; these swaggering Sudanese took what they liked from any Arab, and Ismail stood behind them.

Not dreaming of any resistance from this townsman, the soldier leaned far over in the saddle to catch the reins of the ass. As he leaned, the curved knife of Forbes flashed in the sunset, and flashed again, more redly. With a choked cry, the black pitched out of the saddle headlong.

Forbes caught the horse, swung up into the high saddle, and rode away at speed, nor slackened pace until the dusk of evening closed around him. A wild exultation filled his heart. Now he had everything—a good horse, a water-bottle, dried dates in plenty, and the stars to guide him!

During two days he kept on his way, avoiding the scattered villages, drifting ever toward the mountains and the coast. On the second day he ran into a party of Arabs, hunting. There was no evading them, so he rode among them boldly.

A renegade, said he, going an errand for the emperor. The lie got him through.

There were hundreds of renegades—poor devils who had changed their faith

to save themselves from torture. An entire province had been stripped of inhabitants and given them to occupy; Greeks, French, Italians, Spanish, Dutch and others. They, and the black troops, were Ismail's favorites.

On the next day, as though in answer to his lie, Forbes ran into two of them, an Englishman and a Sicilian. The two were alone, riding for Meknes; he tried to steer clear of them, but they ran him down. They were cruel, bitter, hard men of wrecked lives and blasted future, and the Englishman was by far the worse of the two. He had a pistol, and his sharp eye perceived the truth.

"You're no Arab, by the way you ride," said he, hauling out his pistol. "And no Berber either. Ha, comrade! Here's an escaped slave!"

"Have ye no bowels o' mercy?" spat out Forbes in English, seeing the dark Sicilian reaching for sword or knife, and the pistol cocked. "Let be, and go your way; the Lord will bless you for it."

"And have that jabbering Italian yonder peach on me? Not much," said the other coolly. "English yourself, are you? Scotch, by the burr of your tongue. Turn around and ride with us, and lucky we don't make you walk with your hands tied to our stirrups!"

FORBES uttered a groan of despair, and the two laughed heartily. In the midst, they ceased to laugh; Forbes launched himself from the saddle, caught the Englishman about the body, and fell with him in the dust. The pistol missed fire, but the knife drove home.

The Sicilian dismounted and ran in upon them with drawn sword. Out of the dust and blood rose Forbes, hurling the pistol into the dark face, following it with his knife. The sword caught him over the scalp, but his point slid home again; a brief and savage blur of fighting figures that ended with two men dead, who were better dead perhaps, and Forbes with three horses and a gash over his skull.

It was this wound that did for him.

His own horse was the best of the three. With it, with the pistol and powder and ball, with more looted food, he pressed on hard and fast. He got into the hills, and there made himself a camp near water, for fever was in his wound and he could scarcely keep his feet, and his saddle not at all.

Two days he lay all but senseless, helpless, in delirium. He came to him-

self, weak but clear-headed; he was on the mend. The horse had wandered away. No matter! There were the hills, and there wound a dusty ribbon of road piercing them—the road to the sea!

Food heartened him, water did not lack, and he remained here another day to gain strength. Hope grew in him. He had passed the worst barriers now. By following that road of nights and lying hid by day, he would reach the coast; he had food and weapons and a little money. His future was assured, provided he could steal some sort of boat at the coast and get to sea.

Grimly, he struggled on and on.

DAYS passed. Afoot, he reached the mountains; gaunt, hawk-eyed, alert, worn to skin and bone, he got through them. Starving now, he killed a Berber shepherd and drank the blood of a slaughtered sheep, and staggered on, hiding by day, footing it by night. He followed trails that ever led him northward and a little west.

Came the day when, crouching amid thorn-brush and cactus as a train of horsemen passed, he heard their talk and learned that he was in the territory of the Pasha of Tetuan. This clarified everything for him. That afternoon, late, he had his first glimpse of the sea—a blue glitter of water, far away but certain.

He sat down, then, and shook with passionate sobs until tears were exhausted.

All that night he went on his way, spurred by a fervor that surmounted weariness and bloody feet and hunger. That overheard conversation had changed all his plans. Now he need not worry about the last barrier. He was close to the Spanish territory of Ceuta. He had only to reach the Spanish lines, to be safe for ever. The joyous thrill of it pounded in his veins and pulsed through his whole being. Safe!

Toward dawn, he heard the dogs of a village barking, and began to pick his way around the place. It was no easy matter, for the fields were marked out by hedges of enormous cactus, hundreds of years old. The dogs, aware of him, kept up their noise. The false dawn was graying the east when, in avoiding a cactus-patch, Forbes lost his footing and tumbled into a rocky pit.

He struck headfirst. His half-healed wound was opened, and he lay senseless. When he wakened to consciousness, he

was lying in the village, with chains on his wrist and feet. His escape had come to its end.

WITH this, old Manning's fingers fell, as though his story had come to an end. He leaned back wearily, with an air of finality, and closed his eyes.

Cotterel stared at him, with a look of shock in his eyes, then spoke.

"But look here! You've not finished? What became of Forbes?"

Manning looked up, and his hands moved. "I don't know what became of him. He was taken back to Meknes, that's all we know. Probably he lies in those enormous rotting walls today."

"But still I don't understand." Cotterel had come out of his savage, hostile mood. The abrupt finish of the story, the transition from suspense and triumph ahead, to frightful disaster, had wakened his brain. He was more like his usual self now, and Manning, who had played for that very aim, was thankful to see it.

"What has that story got to do with me?" went on Cotterel, gripped by curiosity and interest. "I can see a certain analogy in the situation, yes. But I don't see where the escape of Forbes has anything to do with whatever try at a break I might make."

"On the contrary, it has everything to do with you," Manning replied. "I know you don't get the point, old man. I didn't want to make it too clear at first. I mentioned one thing that didn't occur to him, that never occurs to anyone in such a situation. It didn't occur to Suds Jackson when he made his successful break recently. It didn't occur to you, and naturally it wouldn't."

"Yes," Cotterel frowned. "I remember. What's that thing?"

"Wait!" Manning made a warning gesture and leaned forward, listening intently.

Cotterel could hear nothing. Yet through the murmurous silence of the prison, he realized the grapevine must be at work—the grapevine which carried news. Old Manning was aware of it, but Cotterel was not. It took years, instead of mere months, to be able to grasp the slight sounds, the telegraphic sounds which eluded even the ears of the prison guards.

Manning was getting something. A blaze came into his eyes, his head jerked

up, his lips moved soundlessly. Then he turned abruptly to Cotterel.

"Suppose you succeeded in making a break, son. You'd be about the best-known man in America, from the police standpoint. There'd be no safety anywhere for you."

Cotterel gestured disdainfully.

"I don't care about that. I'm going to be free again, if only for a day or so! I crave the free air. Just to stand once on a hillside under the blue sky, and be free!"

"Precisely; that proves the point I'm trying to make." Manning smiled slightly. "You think of freedom day and night, just as Forbes did. The one thing that never occurred to him, that has never occurred to you either, the unseen possibility that never occurred to Suds Jackson when he succeeded in his break! I don't mean the fear of death—"

He broke off, and then resumed abruptly, his fingers flying fast.

"Do you know what I just got from the grapevine? That Suds Jackson will be back tomorrow. He's been recaptured, and alive."

"Oh, hell! That's too bad." Cotterel caught his breath sharply. "Oh, I see! You think that possibility hadn't occurred to me?"

"No, not at all," said Manning's fingers. "Think of Forbes in the moment when he passed again between the gates of Meknes and into the slave prison. Think of Suds Jackson, when tomorrow he's brought back inside these gates. That's the unseen possibility; the inevitable moment, not of death, but of return."

Cotterel's eyes dilated. "Oh, I see—I see! You're right. The moment of return, of being brought back here—"

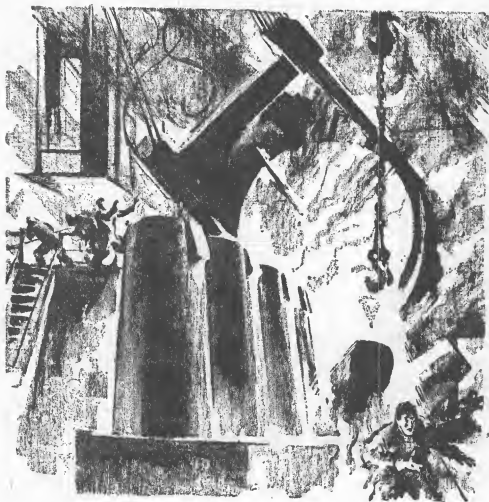
"Just that," said Manning.

COTTEREL lowered his head. A little shiver passed through him as he sat motionless and silent. After a time he looked up, met the gaze of Manning, and wiped fine perspiration from his forehead.

"I get the point," he said suddenly. "I—I—damn it, you're right! I guess I've been the world's prize fool, Manning. Just the bare thought of that moment of return gives me the creeps. I'm sorry for everything I said. Forgive me, won't you?"

Their hands met in understanding.

Another of Gordon Keyne's colorful stories of strange escapes will be a feature of our next issue.



HOT METAL

Illustrated by Grattan Condon

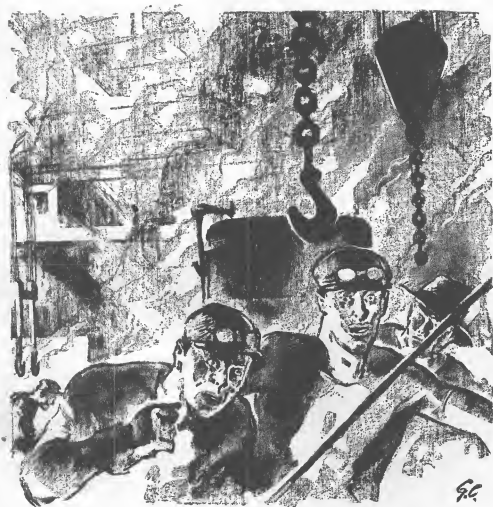
ON a Friday afternoon, in the open hearth of the Aurora Steel and Foundry, the hoist-cable on the hot-metal crane tore loose from the eye of the ladle-beam, and a hundred tons of molten metal ran five feet deep on the floor of the pit-level.

Walt Anthony knew it was going to happen. He had known for a long time that some day the cable, the hook, or one of the ladle-lugs would break, and a ladle of hot steel would drop. And he was sure he'd be in the hot-metal crane cabin when it happened, and be burned to a cinder.

The hot-metal crane cabin is no place for a man who feels the way Walt did.

The job pays well, but it is dangerous. It demands an expert craftsmanship, an ability to endure excessive heat, and an acceptance of the fact that the first mistake made will quite likely be the last one. Hot-metal crane-men are the aristocrats of their craft, and look it: they are usually small, wiry men with faces drawn lean by the tension under which they work; they have the sharp look of high-flying birds in their eyes; and, open hearth men say, their nerves are insulated with ice.

The hot-metal crane-man services the furnaces with pig-iron, taken from the mixer or direct from the blast furnaces and poured through the charging-doors,



*You will not soon forget this virile story of men and steel, by
a two-fisted writing-man who knows a lot about both.*

By OWEN FRANCIS

and he hoists the heats from the pits to the pouring-platform after steel has been made. The crane is built for the handling of ladles: at the end of the hoist-cables hangs a ladle-beam, a heavy bar of steel longer than a ladle's depth. From the beam extend two massive arms whose lower ends have been shaped in wide hooks, not unlike stiff-hanging, partly closed hands. When a ladle is to be hoisted, the beam is lowered over the ladle top, the arms reaching down the ladle sides. Below the rim of the ladle's top are two lugs which are rounded to fit the cupped-palm ends of the arms. With the lugs in the hooks, the ladle can be raised in an even lift.

Free of the floor, the ladle can be moved in any direction the crane-man chooses: it can be raised or lowered; it can be racked toward him or away from him across the width of the open hearth; or by moving the crane along its tracks, the ladle can be carried the entire length of the open hearth building.

When steel is tapped from a furnace, it pours into a ladle in the pit beneath the tapping-spout. With a capacity of eighty or a hundred tons, the deep cup-like ladle brims with boiling steel when the furnace run is over. The hot-metal crane-man then lifts the ladle from the pit, swings it beneath him, and carries it to the pouring-platform.

The molten steel pours into the ingot molds through a hole in the ladle bottom, a hole opened and closed by a long lever operated by workers on the pouring platform. Because of this fact, it is necessary for the ladle to be directly above the comparatively small top of the mold. Moving the ladle beneath him, where he can accurately judge the position of the ingot molds, the crane-man looks down from the crane cabin twenty feet above.

If the crane breaks during this operation, or if the crane-man makes a serious error in judging height or distance, the molten steel will dump on the pit-level floor. The workers on the pouring-platform may escape if given time enough, but the crane-man has little chance to do so: the terrific heat will no doubt burn through the crane's power-line insulation and cause a short circuit. Or the lift may jam, making movement of the crane impossible for a few precious minutes. In either case, the crane-man is trapped above a blazing inferno. It is also quite likely that the steel will explode. If there is water in the pits, and more often than not there is, an explosion takes place from steam generated instantaneously when the molten metal comes in contact with the water. The explosion hurls the molten, lavalike mass upward like the sudden spouting of a volcano.

WALT ANTHONY wasn't the hot-metal crane-man, but he was going to be. He was second crane-man; it was his job to hoist slag-boxes, move bundles of ravel-ropes, set charging-spouts, answer the rappings of the labor-gang straw-boss, and do the everyday run-of-the-mill hoisting. But he was slated for the hot-metal job when Doots Gallagher either died from old age or quit, either of which could be logically expected. Thinking of the day when he would have to climb into the hot-metal crane cabin and swing a ladle of molten steel beneath him, made Walt feel cold and clammy all over. He didn't tell anyone how he felt, or what he thought: he knew he was afraid, and was ashamed of it. So he did the best he could to keep the others from knowing, and hoped desperately a miracle would happen so the day would never come when they sent him up on the hot-metal crane and found out what kind of man he was.

Walt liked cranes. He liked to sit in the second-crane cabin, rolling hell-bent down the open hearth, acting unconcerned about going through the lower end

and out into the mill yard. With disaster near at hand, he would sprag the crane so evenly that the wheels kissed the bumper at the track's end without a jar. And he liked to set a slag-box down, knowing that in his hand that worked the controls he held the lives of the men on the floor below. That never bothered the men of the melting-floor.

Walt could drop the hook and break a toothpick laid lengthwise on the melting-floor, and the men knew it. They had confidence in him, and showed it each day by the casual way they walked under his swaying lifts. That was one of the reasons Walt couldn't tell them he was afraid.

Being swung in the air forty feet above the pit-level floor and cooped in a four-by-six cabin alone for eight hours a day with nothing but the roar of the furnaces for company, Walt had the crane-man's habit of talking to his crane. He called his crane Maggie; and when the rapping started for a lift to be made, Walt would often say:

"All right, Maggie, here we go. And don't creak and groan like that about it, either. I gave you a shot of oil this morning that should make you giddy. . . . That's better. Now, we lower away. Turn the hook so the cinder-man don't lose time. And now we hoist, nice and gentle, until we're free of the floor."

By that time the lift would be in the air; he'd give Maggie the juice, and the job would be over quicker than any other crane-man in the mill could do it.

He knew every bolt, nut, beam, cable and wire on Maggie's huge frame. He knew her from armature to switch, from control-lever to the chip in the wheel on the other end of her fifty-foot span. And he had for Maggie the affection a good craftsman has for his tools.

With the hot-metal crane it was different. It scared him, for he knew some day a ladle would fall. The fear hadn't been with him at first. He started in the open hearth eight years before, and for the past six had been running Maggie. One day, two years ago, when work was slack, he'd sat in Maggie's cabin watching the hot-metal crane-man hoist a ladle from the pit. The thought suddenly came to him of what would happen if the ladle fell and a hundred tons of white-hot metal spilled on the pit floor; the crane-man wouldn't have a chance. He'd be trapped in his four-by-six cage, and burn.

Walt thought about it until the picture became so vivid he couldn't get it out of his mind. The more he thought

about it, the more he thought about the day when Doots Gallagher stepped down and he was promoted to the hot-metal crane job.

He lived in constant dread of the day when the other men in the open hearth found out he was afraid. And for the first time in his life, he began worrying over how small he was—small for an open-hearth man, certainly. He was only five feet six inches, and wouldn't weigh more than a hundred and sixty pounds. Being small was an asset rather than a handicap in the compact crane-cabin, but Walt began feeling he had to prove to anyone who would listen that his size didn't mean a lack of courage. Every time the opportunity presented itself, he would say:

"Why don't old Doots get wise to himself and quit? He's too old to have nerve enough to swing a ladle out of the pit; he just eases them out. I've been itching for a chance for six years."

But he knew he lied, and some day they would all know. If it hadn't been for Millie, he would have quit the job two years ago and taken a crane-man's job over in the bloomer or finishing-mills. Millie was the twenty-year-old daughter of Joe Regan, the melter foreman. She had brown eyes, taffy-colored hair, and was the prettiest girl Walt had ever seen. And she was as proud of Walt as any mill-sweetheart ever was. Millie thought that running the hot-metal crane was the best and most important job in the mill. Every evening, when Walt went to see her, she would start talking about it, telling her father how happy she'd be when Walt got the job. Joe Regan would grin and slap on the back:

"Walt aint built big like first-helpers have to be, but he's got more guts. That hot-metal crane needs that."

It always made Walt feel ashamed, and he would try to change the subject; Millie would laugh and say:

"Look, Dad, he's modest."

IT made Walt sick at heart for Millie to think he was so brave when he was afraid. He loved Millie so much he didn't want to fool her: he wanted to put his arms around her and tell her just how he felt. And he wanted her to understand and be happy, with him keeping the job on the second crane. But he knew if Millie ever found out, she'd give his ring back and probably marry Bill Raugh. Bill was the six-foot first-helper who worked for Joe Regan, and could



"Look, he's modest," Millie would laugh.

whip any man in the mill. He still looked at Millie with love in his eyes, although she was wearing Walt's ring. The hot-metal crane job made a difference with Millie, but Walt still wanted to tell her. Sitting one evening with Millie on the porch, he had started to explain how it was; but she had laughed and said how proud she was of him. After that, he could never get started again.

Wishing there was a way out of the situation but knowing there wasn't, Walt stayed on running the second crane. He had rolled Maggie to the lower end to be out of the hot-metal crane's way, when he saw Snouts, the labor-gang straw-boss, wave in signal that he was wanted on the pit-level. Thinking Snouts wanted to borrow a dollar or so until the eagle shrieked, Walt eased Maggie alongside the ladder and climbed down.

"What's on your mind, Snouts? Want to borrow a couple bucks?"

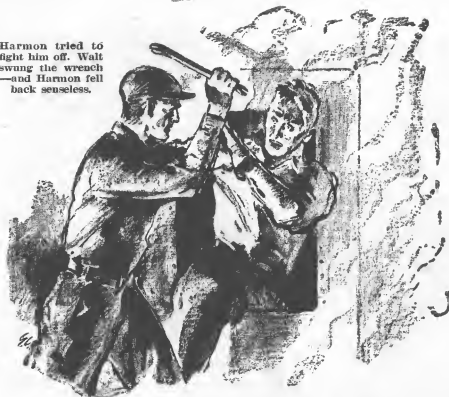
Snouts never wasted conversation that didn't concern money or the labor-gang. He jerked his head in the general direction of the open hearth office:

"Mr. Bennet," he said.

Walt felt a cold, clammy shiver run over him. Mr. Bennet, the open hearth superintendent, called men in the office for only three reasons: to hire, to fire or to promote. Walt knew that Doots had quit at last, and he was to be given the hot-metal job.

He walked slowly toward the superintendent's office, knowing what he was

Harmon tried to fight him off. Walt swung the wrench—and Harmon fell back senseless.



going to do. He had thought it over and had planned that when the day came, he would bluff it out, pretending to be very pleased over the job. The first time he climbed the ladder to the hot-metal crane, he would let go the rung as he reached the top and fall to the steel melting-floor. He knew that it would be easier than pulling a control-lever that swung a ladle full of boiling steel beneath him. At least, they would think it was an accident, and no one would ever know he was afraid.

Forcing a smile to his face and throwing back his shoulders, he went into the office, hoping Mr. Bennet couldn't see the fear through his grin.

Mr. Bennet looked up from his desk.

"I wanted to tell you this myself, Walt," he said.

"Yes sir, what is it?" Walt asked, as if he didn't know.

"Doots Gallagher is taking a month off, and we're too busy to break in a new man."

WALT swallowed hard, but managed to smile more cheerfully.

"And I go on the hot-metal job?" he said, hoping it sounded as if he was pleased.

"I know how anxious you are, Walt, and I don't blame you. But that's just it: I can get a hot-metal crane-man, but can't find a second crane-man."

He saw the look come on Walt's face, but mistook it for disappointment.

"If Doots was leaving for good, Walt, it would be different. I don't want to hold up the furnaces now. You see how it is," he explained, hoping Walt would understand.

Walt sighed, and tried to keep his voice even:

"Well, in a case like this, I guess I can wait a little longer."

"That's the spirit to show, Walt," Mr. Bennet said enthusiastically. "A man sure of himself don't mind waiting awhile. Just between you and me, I don't think Doots will come back. He's going out to California, and they say it's God's country. You'll have the job soon, I promise you that."

Walt walked out of the office, wondering if it wouldn't have been better to have been given the job and have it over with: what was going to happen couldn't be any worse than waiting. He was glad when he was back in the cabin where he could talk to Maggie:

"I aint leaving you yet, Maggie. Doots Gallagher is going to California, and Mr. Bennet says he might like it so well he'd stay out there. But I don't think he will—honest, I don't, Maggie. They have floods, dust-storms and such, and they say it's just a lot of lemon-trees without a steel-mill in sight. Doots won't like that, Maggie; you know he won't."

The hot-metal man who came from Duquesne to take Doots' place for the month was a six-footer. He was a blond and looked like a Swede or Dane. Walt had to admit that he had a pair of shoulders. Walt would have given anything he had, except his love for Millie, to be big and strong like the new man was, and go climbing up on the hot-metal crane with a big, sincere grin on his face. But it's not strength that does the hot-metal job well; the crane has all the power; the crane-man has to supply the intelligence. Eric Harmon, the Duquesne man, knew up from down, but Walt knew he would never be given a bonus for the way he racked in a ladle. When he set a ladle down in the pit, he lowered too much, and the cable jerked when he took the slack in. It wasn't so noticeable to the others, who realized the man was working with the unaccustomed feel of new levers. But Walt knew he could run a crane better than the Duquesne man ever would. . . .

Doots Gallagher had been gone three weeks when the letter came. Mr. Bennet got the news, and soon it was being discussed all over the open hearth: Doots had written that he was staying in California, that he had never seen such a nice country. He was going to loaf the rest of his life and enjoy it. He added a note for Walt; he said he wished him good luck, and for him to always make sure the ladle was free of the pits before racking in. Mr. Bennet smiled as he read the letter to Walt. Then he said:

"Well, Walt, the job's yours at last. You'd better spend an hour or so with the man coming to take your old job, so he'll know the routine. Good luck."

"Thank you, Mr. Bennet," Walt said. "You said spend an hour or so with the new man, didn't you?"

"That's all. He's a good crane-man, and will learn the ropes quickly. After these six years you don't mind waiting an hour longer before getting on the hot-metal crane, do you, Walt?"

"No sir, I guess not," Walt answered.

AS he walked across the mill yard and into the lower end of the open hearth, the familiar sights and sounds suddenly seemed strange and far away. He looked toward the upper end where the hot-metal crane was lowering to pick up a heat, and he thought that he would be expected to place the next ladle. But he knew he wouldn't; he would follow out what he had planned when he climbed the ladder to the hot-metal crane. He

hoped he wouldn't lose his nerve. He tried hard not to think of Millie, for when he did, a lump came in his throat.

The lower-end crew knew about his getting the new job and were waiting for him: two men hid behind the furnace, and when he walked by, they grabbed him, lifting him by the arms and legs. Carrying him between them, they walked to the water-trough and sat him in the water. Then they carried him to the furnace and held him close as the door was slowly raised. Steam arose from his trouser-seat in a cloud. The men roared with laughter: Walt Anthony had been given a new job, and had been given the open hearth welcome.

With their shouts in his ears, Walt slowly climbed the ladder to Maggie's cabin. He wanted to be alone with her before the new crane-man came, so that he could bid her good-by.

HE had just reached the cabin and was climbing in when he heard the hoist-cable of the hot-metal crane snap like a whiplash, there was a crash as the ladle smashed against the pouring platform, the scream of the lever-man as the flames hit him, and a hissing roar as the hundred tons of molten metal splashed on the pit-level floor. Walt didn't turn to see what had happened—he knew without looking. He threw the control lever and had Maggie rolling toward the upper end before he got his feet through the cabin trap. Then he looked.

The molten steel had dumped near the line of ingot-molds. The suddenly lightened ladle was swinging like a pendulum. Flames and smoke were lapping at the hot-metal crane cabin.

A hundred feet away, he felt the burning heat sear his face. He threw the controls on full and rolled with all the speed Maggie had toward the inferno: it was like going in through the opened door of a blazing furnace; the heat hit him, lashing at his eyes with a piercing, stinging pain.

The swinging ladle had jammed, its opened maw wedged by the overturned ingot-molds. The remaining hoist-cable which held it was rigidly taut under the strain. Harmon was frantically working the levers, trying to pull free. The cabin of the hot-metal crane was smoking and would soon blaze. The insulation was burning; soon the flames would eat through the copper wire, and the crane would short-circuit. Walt thought grimly, if that happened, Harmon and he

both would be cooked. With the ladle wedged, it would be impossible for Maggie to push the hot-metal crane as he had planned. He and Maggie could try, but they couldn't lift the ladle and the entire line of ingot-molds without blowing a fuse in the power-house

HE yelled at Harmon to lower away and rack out so that the ladle would slide free. But his voice couldn't be heard a foot away above the din, and thereafter he saved his breath, so his lungs wouldn't fill with smoke or flame.

He was over the hot metal now and going full speed. He threw the lever in reverse, and the wheels shrieked as Maggie slid to a stop, her beam resting against the beam of the hot-metal crane.

He saw Harmon drop the control-levers and start crawling out of the cabin; he had lost his head and was going to jump. Walt yelled again, and picked up a wrench from the tool-box. He crawled out on Maggie's beam, inching himself along edgewise trying to keep the beam between him and the flames that shot up around him. His clothes smoked and blazed, but he made it to the hot-metal crane cabin. Harmon was screaming and tried to fight him off. Walt swung the wrench, hitting Harmon across the eyes; he fell back senseless into the cabin.

Cursing Harmon for his large body, which filled most of the space behind the controls, Walt crawled in and grabbed the levers. They still had juice in them. He lowered the hoist and racked out slowly, trying to break the ladle from the ingot-mold grip. The cable buckled, then pulled steadily. He felt the massive crane quiver under the strain. The ladle shifted, moving the ingot train, and settled back. He eased the pull so the cable wouldn't snap. The cabin was ablaze now; his body ached with agonizing pain. Another try might do it. He racked in, forcing himself to feed the power slowly so the cable wouldn't buckle. Through the flames and smoke, he saw the molten mass of metal surge over the ingot-molds, which had been a barrier, and cut a path toward the pits. Number Three still held the water from a recent washing-down of a ladle. If the hot metal reached the pits, it would splatter the roof with tons of white-hot lava. Both cranes would go dead.

He fed the power steadily until the ladle tilted, then threw the control full on. There wasn't time to take it easy

now; either the ladle would wrench free, the cable would break or a fuse blow. The ladle tore loose with a jerk that swung it against the wall of the melting-floor like a giant battering ram. He caught it on the back-spin and brought it to a wavering stop over Number Three pit. He lowered, then hoisted with a sudden jerk that snapped the hoist-cable; the ladle dropped into the pit, its opened top in the path of the flowing hot metal.

He reached for the lever that moved the crane lengthwise on its track and felt it respond to the power that was moving it from over the grilling heat. He felt the motion, and laughed derisively as the armature blazed angrily and went dead, for he knew the momentum was carrying them. He looked back at Maggie, a blazing torch, left over the inferno, and thought crazily that he should go back and push her from over the heat. Then he fell limply over the useless controls.

When the crane drifted to a stop at the upper end, they lifted Walt Anthony and Eric Harmon from the cabin. Both were unconscious, but Doctor Colcord said the burns were painful but not serious. Walt's body had shielded Harmon's, but Walt should be all right in a few weeks.

TWO weeks later Walt Anthony went back to work. As he walked through the open hearth on the way to the hot-metal crane, he smiled up at Maggie's fresh coat of paint and new armatures, and thought what had happened: Millie and Joe Regan and just about the entire mill crew had come to see him in the hospital. It made him embarrassed to hear them talk so much of how brave he was, and he told them he wasn't brave at all. He told them he had always been afraid of the hot-metal crane; if the ladle hadn't fallen so quick he hadn't thought what he was doing, he wouldn't have had the nerve to go up on the crane at all. They all laughed, Millie bending over and kissing him; and Joe Regan had said:

"That's the way all the hot-metal cranes-men are before they run it the first time. They're scared to death and are ashamed to tell anyone. After they work the levers just once, they're all right. I've never seen a one that wasn't just like Walt says he was. But of course, they weren't as brave as Walt."

Walt thought maybe Joe Regan was right. He knew he'd never be afraid again, and wondered why he ever had been.



We Must Figure on Death

Wherein the master mariner who came to be known as Lemon Lancaster first defeats an ancient enemy of seafaring men. . . . The nineteenth of the "Ships and Men" series.

By

H. BEDFORD-JONES and
CAPTAIN L. B. WILLIAMS

THE advertising business, these days, runs into some strange by-paths. A friend of mine, Tony Lawrence, who handles a lot of advertising problems for a citrus fruit concern, dropped in at the house one night when Captain Corbely was there, and started an argument. Tony had been working up an entire library for his company, on the subject of citrus juice being used at sea as a preventive against scurvy, and claimed it had first been done about 1800.

"You're a couple of centuries off," said Cap'n Corbely, who had brought over some books to show me. He picked up one of them. "The year is 1600, my friend."

Tony waved his hand. "I'm not talking about some chance shot in the dark. All the old seamen were trying to prevent scurvy, and couldn't do it. I'm talking about the first deliberate use of citrus juice for that purpose."

"So am I," said the skipper grimly. "And it's all in 'Purchas His Pilgrimes' for you landlubbers to read, only you spend your time on scientific rot instead of old sea-captains' reports."

Tony Lawrence got excited about it, and Corbely lugged out some of the East

India Company's reports, and they went to bat. Scurvy was one of the great scourges of the world, which according to Tony had been set to rest by science. It had been probably the greatest factor in sea life, in trade and commerce, wiping out ships and entire expeditions. When the period of discovery opened up distant sea-lanes, and voyages lasted for months and years, scurvy got in its mysterious work. It had to be fought, guarded against, at huge cost and effort. Not until science finally tracked it down and beat it, did the Seven Seas become a safe place for mankind.

Corbely sniffed at all that. "Science, my eye! A seaman beat it, long ago. A housewife in Woolwich tracked it down three hundred years before your land-sharks and doctors did. And they didn't have sense enough to make use of her wisdom, that's all!"

WE dug into it to learn the truth. One had to get acquainted with the men of that day, with what it meant to go to sea in that period. Our present era of charted seas and scientific precision had to be swept clear away.

So it was that we came upon the four men in Woolwich. . . .



Middleton barked: "Four months to the Cape, and ye all know what that means!" And Lancaster nodded. "Aye, lad . . . we must figure on death."

Of a bitter January night, they sat about a blazing fire in the Red Rose tavern, and over their sack and mulled ale discoursed of the death that lay ahead. All four were master seamen, but chief of them was James Lancaster, bluff and bronzed, with wide blue eyes set above his short curly beard.

LANCASTER pulled at his long-stemmed pipe and listened thoughtfully while Middleton barked away:

"I've the Dutch charts for you, James, aye; and Linschoten was dead right in every word he said o' winds and tides. But we must figure four months to the Cape, and ye all know what that means."

Lancaster nodded. It was the first voyage of the East India merchants, and he was the general in command, and his high ship the *Dragon* was admiral of the four. In those days a ship, and not a man, bore this title.

"That's why we're taking along the little *Guest*, John. Before we reach the Cape, we'll refill our water-butts and our supplies from her, and cast her adrift. And our dead men will be replaced by her crew. Aye, lad; for we must figure on death."

All four nodded gravely. Death by sea and wind and unknown shores, death from shot and ball, death from scurvy—grimmet and surest of all.

"Tell me something, Lancaster," spoke out Master Heyward of the *Susan*. "I've run into you during long voyages, and after 'em. Ye've never been took sick a day. When your men were rotten and you couldn't muster a boat's crew, you were always hale and hearty. Why?"

Lancaster chuckled in his beard. "My wife has a remedy against all disorder, or so she thinks. It's the grace o' God, not her sovereign remedy, that's kept me well. But I'm a man o' my word, as she knows, and she gives me a store of the stuff, and I take it on my promise. Think no more of it. Aye, lads, it's a fearsome and terrible reflection, that when we get to the Cape with its winds and storms, when we need every man on the lines, we're certain to have two-thirds of our crews wi' their teeth rotting out and their bodies swollen and helpless!"

"We'll revictual and refit at Saldanha Bay, north o' the Cape," put in William Brand, drawing down his shaggy brows. He captained the *Ascension*, a dour, hard man. "But that won't save us from the scurvy. One says one thing about it, another says another; every man to his own theory, and surgeons be damned! Eat salt meat, as we must, and there's no escaping it. Well, then, face it with a good heart!"

"Better still, find a way to avoid it," Lancaster said. "We'll have two hun-



Illustrated by George Avison

dred men aboard the *Dragon*. If we reach the Moluccas with a hundred and fifty, we'll be in luck. That's heavy odds o' death, lads. However, we'll make it if the Dutchmen can! We're carrying twenty-seven thousand pounds in cargo and money, and the company's spending forty-five thousand on the ships and men; we've the best of everything, and by heaven we'll prove that the fleet's not lacking in the best o' men to do the work! Well, I must home. Good night to you all."

He tucked his cloak about him and stamped home through the snow, thoughtful enough, the problem of death still weighing on his mind. Much to his relief, his good wife was in bed and sleeping, so he turned in without waking her.

NEXT morning, however, Mistress Lancaster cornered him. She was a plain, hearty, sensible woman, and if she had a tongue in her head, she used it for love's sake and not for shrewish byplay.

"Now, James, where are those bottles?"

"Bottles?" he repeated blankly. He was checking over a Dutchman's pilotage

for the journey home around the Cape. "What bottles?"

"For the remedy," said she with tart tongue. "As you know well. Out with 'ee, and fetch me home bottles and jugs!"

Lancaster frowned. "The remedy be changed, woman. Now, look you! Homeward bound about the Cape, if a man hath no weather for observation, he can safely keep in sixty fathom water while the ground be shelly; but if it be oozy, he'll know he's near Cape Agulhas—there's a valuable point to note. And you prate of bottles!"

"Aye," said she. "Bottles and jugs. I'm making up enough o' the lemon juice for your whole crew, James, and I'll need a plenty of containers."

HE shoved aside his work, in dismay. "Nell, there's not a lass in England who's your equal—but pause a bit. In our ship, for such a cruise, every bit o' space is precious. You can well enough put up a few bottles o' the juice for my use, but for two hundred men—Lord save us all! There's no room for it."

"You'll make room," she said firmly. "If it hadn't been for my remedy, you'd be a dead man this day, or the life would be rotted out of you, as it is out o' many an old seaman. And now you go on an important voyage, wi' letters from Her Majesty, and you general in command, to the far Indies. And think ye I'll see you go unprepared? Not I. The lemons are bought and ready, and I'll have you get the bottles."

"It's absurd!" Lancaster broke out. "Why, my men won't stand such treatment! I'll be the laughing-stock o' London."

"You'll do what I say, James Lancaster; else you don't go to sea—general or no general!" his wife declared, and meant her words. "Scurvy, say most, do come from sea air and eating salt meat. I know better. I've talked wi' many a seaman, and one and all tell me the same thing; the craving for green stuff, for acid tang i' the blood. You've said it yourself."

"Listen, my precious lass," said Lancaster earnestly. "Ye know nothing about it. The great men of science, the royal societies, the queen's own physicians, ha' looked into this, and they be wiser 'than you. Fresh meat, they say, will cure it—"

Mistress Lancaster shook her finger at him.

"You'll do what I say, or another man goes master o' the *Dragon*, if I must to London and see Her Majesty myself! Now, is it yes or no?"

Lancaster suppressed a groan. "Aye, if you're set on it," he said sourly.

"And ye'll ladle out each man two spoons per day, of a morning—on an empty stomach? Your word of honor?"

He swallowed hard. "Aye, if you'd make a fool of me."

"Better a live fool than a dead lion, my man; and you mind it," she retorted. "I be none o' your wiseacre scientists, but I know that when a body craves something, that's what a body needs. And lemon juice hath kept you in health these many years, so to the Indies it goes with you. And your word of honor, mind!"

"Aye," grunted Master Lancaster unhappily. "But lemons cost good round money, lass, and—"

"And I've spoke wi' Sir John Hart yesternight, when he was watching the lading of the ships, and got his warrant for the lemons as part of the expenses of your ship," she broke in. "So ha' done with your objections."

Lancaster got her the bottles; but soon enough he began to hear from the matter. Sir John Hart, one of the associated backers of the venture, held his sides when he told about it—and he told the tale everywhere.

When it first reached Lancaster's ears, he was arguing with the chief rigger about the price of a main topsail, holding that twelve pound twelve shillings was too high. "Not so high as delicacies like lemons for common seamen," said the other with a grin. And they began to call him "Lemon" Lancaster; but not to his face.

VISITORS were coming down from London in flocks. The new company was sinking its whole subscribed capital, over seventy thousand pounds, in this venture; a tremendous sum to gamble on spice from the Moluccas. Among the visitors was many a learned man. The physicians talked at length with Lancaster, trying to show him the folly of this wasteful notion. For lemons were expensive as the devil.

Each wise man had a different theory about the scurvy, and a different remedy. The other captains harkened. Heyward took aboard a great quantity of fowl; hen's blood being a sure remedy, according to him. Middleton laded chests of

purgatives. Brand damned the lot of them for fools, but saw to his salt meat casks with careful eye. And Lancaster, stowing the jugs and bottles that his wife sent down, was the butt of many a joke.

The surgeon appointed to the *Dragon* strove with him earnestly. A dour and opinionated man, this surgeon held all acids in abomination. One night he came to Lancaster's house and expounded his own theories about the scurvy. Claimed he, if enough saltpeter were fed all hands, the scurvy would be warded off, since it was but the restrained humors of the body seeking escape through the tissues.

"Stuff and nonsense!" said Mistress Lancaster, and the argument waxed hot. In the midst of it, in walked Martin Hearne, who was nephew to the good lady. He bussed her roundly and shook hands with Lancaster, who gave him curt greeting.

A DARK, lean man was Hearne, with clever eyes and the name if not the spirit of a gentleman. He was learned in clerky things, had killed two men in duels, and to Lancaster he was a bird of ill omen. As a matter of fact, some queer things were said of Martin Hearne. He had the gift of second sight, went the word. Not that it brought him any great luck. Like all such folk, he might foretell the fate of other men, but his own he could not see.

He listened to the argument with his thin-lipped, twisted smile, and then put in a word or two of his own.

"You need not argue the matter, for three reasons," he said to the surgeon. "The first is Master Lancaster, who listens to no reason. The second is Mistress Lancaster, who will hear no reason. The third, my good sir, is that you'll be dead of the scurvy yourself within the six-month."

The surgeon, having already perceived the folly of argument, took his leave.

Hearne, smiling, turned to Lancaster.

"Uncle James, I've good news for you. I'm going on the voyage. What's more, I'm appointed to your own ship, the admiral."

"You?" said Lancaster. "God save us all!"

His wife hugged young Hearne. She had a leaning to such evil, ruffling blades, as most good women have. He explained to them, briefly.

Aboard each of the ships went a merchant, to handle trading and all busi-

ness of the company. Since death was ever close in such a voyage, each merchant had an associate and each associate a substitute. If two died, one would live to keep the books. Martin Hearne was third aboard the *Dragon*.

Lancaster, looking into that dark face, shook his head.

"Best be frank about it, lad," said he, wasting no words. "I like you not, nor you me. But God forbid that I do you a wrong in my heart, so come and welcome! But mind well, there's discipline aboard."

"And lemon juice," said Hearne, with a smile. "Neither one nor the other will cause me any loss o' sleep, I promise you!"

Later, Lancaster frowned at his good wife when she bade him take care of Hearne.

"Martin's got the makings of a great man, husband," said she. "He's never been out of England afore now; a bit wild, maybe, but worth the right guidance."

"I doubt it," Lancaster said bluntly. "He's the kind to explode when pent up on shipboard. But for your sake, lass, I'll be easy with him."

IT was the middle of February when the ships dropped down the river, and two months more when they left England; in those days, men waited for a wind. And almost before the anchors were hoysed and stowed, Lancaster had trouble on his hands.

His surgeon was stubborn in his refusal to countenance lemon juice, little dreaming that Hearne's prediction was safe enough to come true. There were some aboard glad to adopt his advice, if so they might escape that sour morning draft on an empty stomach. The ship's company had its share of malcontents and trouble-breeders, and the scoffing at Lemon Lancaster had spread among the crew. So the surgeon, with the master gunner and a round score besides, flatly refused the lemon juice. In this, Martin Hearne took a leading part.

Lancaster had been out to the Indies ere this, and knew the vital need of discipline. Now he saw it ebbing away rapidly, with Hearne egging on the others. As they sailed to the southward, he spoke once and again with the young man, but had no luck.

It was the seventh of May, the day they left the Grand Canary behind, that he summoned Hearne into his cabin.

"You're a sullen dog, Martin," said he, being a man of plain speech. "I've tried kindness with you, and to small avail. You're the one man from whom I'd expect full backing, but you only provoke trouble daily. What's the answer?"

HEARNE regarded him with a thin, bitter smile, his dark eyes smoldering. Wine was in him now, as it was often. "I'll not lick your boots, Uncle James," said he, "nor any other man's boots. You're too high and mighty for my taste, as you know well. You can shift me in to another ship, as you know well also."

Lancaster frowned at him.

"I will not. Pass on to others a drunken wastrel and admit I can't handle him? Not me, lad. You know the rules about liquor. The next time you're drunk, you'll get a dozen lashes."

"Flog me like one of your seamen? If you do, so help me, I'll kill you!" cried Hearne. "I'm a gentleman!"

"I'm not," said Lancaster, fingering his brown beard. "I'm general of this fleet, lad. What's more, I've a commission of martial law from the hands of Her Majesty, God bless her! And I'll have you triced up quicker than any other man aboard, for the simple reason that you're known to be my nephew."

"Not yours, thank heaven!" sneered Hearne.

"My wife, poor lass!" and Lancaster sighed a little. "For her sake I've been patient, Martin; but I'll stand little more of your nonsense. You're infecting this whole crew with discontent. You're endangering the venture. I'm warning you with a kind heart, as bidden by Holy Writ; but some day you'll go too far."

Hearne's thin lip curled.

"You're a simple dolt in your way, Uncle James," said he with contempt. "You and your Bible reading every day—ha! This venture needs a man of spirit. Now, look you! I'm none of your crew, to be sodden with your sickly sour juice and doltish notions. I'm not responsible to you, but to the company. I'll drink what I damned please."

"I've said my say, Martin," Lancaster replied calmly. "God help me, I'm responsible for every ship and every soul in this command. My wife gave you in to my care, but four hundred and eighty other men are in my care, and seventy thousand pounds, and the trust of my friends and my queen. Dolt? Aye, I'm no very great commander, God wot, but I do my best. And it's only a very wise

man, Martin, or a very simple man like me, who reads Holy Writ—the one because he understands it, the other because he needs it. And you, Martin, are neither. No more warnings. Clear out.”

Martin Hearne swaggered out with a twist to his lip. James Lancaster sat there with his hands clenched before him, as the ship swayed and the timbers creaked, and his eyes were troubled.

IT was a week later that Hearne, drinking, ruffling and dicing, drew his dirk and would have killed the chief merchant but that men fell on him and held him fast. Lancaster strode into the cabin, and gave quiet orders—and Hearne was taken out to the deck and spread over a gun-carriage, and was given a dozen with the cat.

When they had washed the blood off his back with brine, he stood up. He was sobered, and he looked Lancaster in the eye as he spoke.

“You’ll mind what I promised if ye did this.”

Lancaster said nothing, and Hearne went below with a red devil in his eyes.

Meantime, each morning, the lemon juice was ladled out, and those who would have none of it began to swell in the joints and move listlessly about the decks. The surgeon worked with them mightily, and talked much with the master gunner and with Hearne, and there was great murmuring against Lancaster for his iron hand and his grim discipline. But the ships sailed on.

One night there was a crossbow loosed, none knew where or by whom. The bolt missed Lancaster by two fingers’ breadth, as he stood on the poop conning the stars. He said nothing of it, but the wind of death had fanned his cheek closely that night. If he could prove nothing, he knew all he needed to know. And was helpless.

The Master’s Mate came to him another night, and told of mutterings and dark words among the men aloft and aloft. Hearne was in the thick of it, but nothing could be proven against him. Many of them feared the man.

“He’s fey at times,” said the Master’s Mate as they talked. “Why, sir, what d’ye think he told me but this morning? He looked at me hard, and said he, I’d die and have honors at my burial, in a far place; and the guns of this same ship would be fired to do me honor, and would kill better men than me. Sir, he’s daft!”

Daft or not, he was dangerous. And in a later day, Lancaster was to remember that queer saying, when the shotted guns of the *Dragon* roared over the watery grave of this same Master’s Mate, and slew Master Brand and others of his crew from the *Ascension* in their boat.

Fear and terror of Martin Hearne spread through the ship. He had a swaggering masterful way with him, but after that one flogging he refrained from liquor, though hatred sat in his eyes when he looked at Lancaster. There began to rise talk of mutiny, and what could be done by lusty men if they took the ship and set out to seek plunder; it came to Lancaster’s ears, and he knew Hearne was behind it, and he was helpless.

Night after night he sat in his cabin, the weather being good, and conned the big Bible with its heavy black type. Night after night he lay in his berth, or knelt beside it if the seas were not strong, and wrestled in prayer for guidance from aloft. He was a simple man, with a strange simple faith and simple iron will, the sort of man to do great things and do them quietly, or do terrible things and do them sternly, or do little things and do them nobly. But here he did not know what to do. Hearne was too clever for him, would give him no handle, and that was the truth of it.

TAKE care of the lad, Mistress Lancaster had said; little did Hearne need any care-taking! It was not this that troubled James Lancaster one whit. But he realized that, first, his life was in danger night and day from this man, and much depended on his life. Further, and more important to his mind, the entire voyage was in danger.

Here was a festering sore rapidly infecting the whole ship. This one shrewd and unscrupulous man menaced everything. Talk of mutiny and piracy, of gold and riches and women, was enough to set all hands stark mad; and backed up by Hearne, by the master gunner, by the dour surgeon, it would lead to wreck-age, unless checked. How to check it?

Lancaster, helpless, sought higher help, and knew not that it was already within his heart and soul. For, like many another man, he sought the voice of God from the tempest and the earthquake; and recognized the still small sound only after it had come. . . .

On the twentieth of June, the ship’s boy came to him, whimpering, with a

queer story of voices heard that evening on the stern walk—a gallery above the rudder, around the square stern. The boy was scared stiff. Men's voices, he said, talking of mutiny and powder and killing in cold blood. He knew nothing definite, but he told enough to send a cold chill through Lancaster's very soul. So it had come to crisis! And not a shadow of excuse to clap Hearne into irons—even if that would do any good, which was doubtful.

That night, Lancaster read in his Bible with agony of soul, and knelt in prayer, for the ship was on a steady keel. Two degrees north of the Line, with calms



The men of the *Dragon*, hale and hearty, stared amazedly at the men of the other ships. The scurvy had laid hold upon them all.

and much contrary wind, and all the ships keeping well in company.

He fell asleep at last—and wakened to shouts and trampling feet. Horror seized on him. He reached for sword and pistols. Mutiny, then? The sun was up, and he broke for the deck hurriedly.

No mutiny. Instead, a great proud Portugal bellying out of the north, a carrack deep-laden for the Indies. Alert and joyous, Lancaster sent his roar along the deck, ordered out signal for the other ships to follow, and sent the *Dragon* booming along with every scrap of sail set to the steady light air.

The other ships fell behind. The morning waxed and heated to noon, over a glassy sea with hardly even a ground-swell, and still the *Dragon* leaned to the spread of canvas. Mile by mile, she crept up on that big Portugal until, by noon, the carrack was desperately and frantically loosing the cannon from her high stern, to no avail.

Lancaster bore on. His men were armed and ready. Sink her? Not he, by heaven! She was deep-laden, and a prize worth the having. He paced the poop deck, in his gleaming steel cap and breastplate; his men had matches alight, he had his pistols ready. Muskets and crossbows and swords, as the two ships crept closer, until a spattering fire broke out, and the grapnels were poised for flinging.

And there was Hearne, in steel cap and breastplate likewise, the first man over her rail as the ships staggered and crashed and swung—the first man, after Lancaster himself. A quick, brief breaking of battle there, and the Portugal fled for it, and Hearne after them into the cabins with a wild yell on his lips.

And after Hearne, James Lancaster.

HE came on the man in the big after-cabin, came upon him striking down a poor devil and stripping him of jeweled gauds. Beyond a swinging door was an empty cabin. Lancaster came up to Hearne, mindful of a pistol-ball that had glinted off his breastplate a moment earlier; and Hearne swung around, his dark lean face aglow with devil's light.

"So it was your pistol, Martin?" said Lancaster. "And it failed, as your cross-bow failed!"

Hearne gripped at his empty pistol and cursed hotly. Lancaster, his own pistol cocked and ready, nodded at the empty cabin.

"I'd have a word with you—in there," said he. His eyes were wide and cold as ice, but very steady.

"Have it here, damn you," said Hearne.

"In there, I said. What!"—and Lancaster laughed with no mirth at all. "You and your precious mutiny—you'd not talk it over with me, man? What if I'd be willing to join you and navigate the ship—eh?"

"You? You'd join—plague take you!" Hearne's eyes widened for an instant; then he smiled his twisted smile. "Join us, eh? No chance of that. Trying one of your tricks on me, eh?"

Lancaster nodded, but his eyes were more than ever like ice.

"Aye, lad, and it worked. I've heard enough. In there, for a private word in your ear—quick about it!"

The sharp command, the knife-edge of the voice, sent Hearne into the cabin. After him went in Lancaster, and closed the door.

THE Portugal was taken, and not a man lost in the taking, despite all the shooting and conflict; or so it was thought, indeed. But when the other three ships came up and their crews came swarming aboard to join in the looting, sad word arose and was brought to James Lancaster, as he stood in the late afternoon sunlight directing the work.

In a cabin had been found Martin Hearne, with a pistol-ball between his eyes. And below, with a sword-stroke through his heart, the master gunner was dead. Hearing this, Lancaster nodded.

"It is the will of God," said he in his quiet way.

The matter was passed over as of small account, before greater things. The lading of the carrack was easily shipped out and divided, in that quiet sea; but here was something else. The men of the *Dragon* were hale and hearty, for the most part, and finding themselves suddenly cheek to jowl with men from the other three ships, stared amazedly. For those men were pallid and like lead in color, and moved heavily, and were broken out with sores and swellings. The scurvy had laid hold upon them all.

"And not upon us?" said Lancaster, when he heard about it. "Well, then, let's give thanks to God, where it belongs."

"And not forget the lemon juice," said some one. Bluff Middleton of the *Hector* let out a snort and a scoffing laugh.

WE MUST FIGURE ON DEATH

"Nonsense! It's but a touch that comes wi' the salt meat. I've got it well in hand with medicines. When we touch at Saldanha Bay, ye'll see my crew sound and hearty. But you and your lemon juice, James—ah!" He shook his head sagely. "Ye know well that it comes quickly to some ships, slow to others; and when it comes, it's with a rush. I feel sorry for your poor men, James Lancaster."

"They'll come through," said Lancaster. Middleton gave him a sharp look.

"What's wrong with you? By God, here's a fat prize, hardly a man lost, weather good—and damme if you ain't got the look of a man in torment! What's wrong?"

"Nothing's wrong, John," and Lancaster smiled. The deep strong gravity of his eyes was returning slowly; it was true, his face had worn a queer haunted look—but his smile banished it.

"No, nothing's wrong," he went on, and glanced about. "At least, nothing's wrong with my ship. Better look to your own, for I don't like the faces of your men by half."

Middleton clapped him on the shoulder and laughed jovially.

When they had shared everything out of the Portuguese ship, they let her go her ways, and the wind shot them down across the Line.

Here they took all the victuals out of the little *Guest*, stripped her clean, divided her men among the four tall ships, took her spars and broke her upper works asunder for firewood, and cast her adrift.

ON into July and through August, ever to the south and eastward, with the winds fair enough on the whole. And as the four ships drove, Lancaster made out queer things aboard the other three; staggering skeleton men about the decks, the merchants taking turns at the helm or up aloft, and fewer and fewer persons in sight at all. Aboard the *Dragon*, however, all was well enough, and there was no more muttering or discontent.

It was the ninth of September when they raised Saldanha Bay. Lancaster came first into the bight, and cast anchor. The other three ships were standing in, but as he watched them come and saw how they handled, his face whitened.

"Out wi' the boats," he ordered. "All hands! And God preserve us all this day, for we'll have need of it."

A true word and a bitter one.

The three ships came staggering in. Aboard each of them nothing moved. A few poor feeble things crawled about the anchors and managed to let go; that was all. Not a boat was hoisted out, not a sail was taken in, not a line touched. When Lancaster stepped aboard the vice-admiral, it was like a ship of the dead. Sodden things lay about the decks, rotting shapes crawled and moaned, bluff Middleton was himself like a scarecrow. Swollen, dying creatures, every one of them. And so with the other two ships as well—down to the last man.

A hundred and five died there, and the others were little better, until rest and proper diet set them afoot again. But not in James Lancaster's ship.

AND that," said Captain Corbely, as he thumbed over his books and drew down his brows at us, "is all of the yarn to the point. Lancaster went on to success and knighthood—"

"But hang it, wait!" broke in Tony Lawrence excitedly. "Why, if that yarn is true, cap'n, the greatest scourge of the sea was licked right there! Then why wasn't it made public? Why wasn't it known?"

Corbely gave me a wink.

"They didn't have radio back in those days, that's why! And no joke about it, either. That's a fact. Lancaster knew, sure enough, what he'd discovered; but people laughed at him all the same. It wasn't followed up."

"Why," gasped Lawrence, "it's an amazing story! It's magnificent!"

"So it is," said Cap'n Corbely, "but I don't mean what you mean. I mean this seaman Lancaster, who could do things the way he did; he went on—he walked with kings, as the poet feller said; but the big thing in this yarn, to my mind, is how he made everything right aboard that ship of his."

"Oh, nonsense," Tony Lawrence put in. "That's all right, sure; but good Lord, man! The big thing is in the discovery about citrus juice—"

"That's because you work for citrus juice," said Captain Corbely gravely, "and I'm a master in sail, like James Lancaster. Maybe, after all, that's why he didn't think the lemon-juice business very important. He probably remembered what one of them Bible chaps said about putting first things first."

But Tony failed to get the point.

Another notable story in this "Ships and Men" series will appear in our next issue.

Number Three Dog

An old-guard Blue Book writer comes back to us with this brief but vivid drama of a G-man on the job.

By WILLIAM BYRON
MOWERY

Illustrated by
Austin Briggs



FROM his seat in the grandstand McNain watched the pack streaking down the home stretch. The red-jacketed dog, a rod ahead, was loping in to an easy win.

"Number Three dog," the agent muttered to himself. "Belger always plays Number Three on the nose, the Chief says. I suppose I ought to go and watch the pay-off again—about my only chance to spot him."

Without waiting for the finish of the race, McNain sought the nearest stair-head and walked down the cement corridor to the gallery. Close to the pay-off window, he struck up a casual chat with a popcorn-vendor.

A few minutes later the people who held tickets on Number Three came streaming in to collect. McNain scrutinized them sharply, with a hand on the cold automatic in his pocket. Belger—to give him the best known of his aliases—had already shot his way out of two arrests. Back East, the chair was waiting for the mobster. The methodical Chief had gathered court-sure evidence of half a dozen killings against Smoky Belger.

There were perhaps thirty people in the pay-off line. One by one McNain looked them over, very carefully. Identifying Smoky Belger would not be easy. In a grandstand crowd or a tourist-jammed city it would be next to impossible. Since his flight from the big town, Belger undoubtedly had had his face worked on, and had made other alterations in himself. But in a small handful of people like this pay-off line, a man stood a chance of spotting him, by elimination or otherwise.

The line gradually dwindled, merged with the gallery crowd and vanished. No

Belger—nor anyone faintly resembling the killer.

"Hell," McNain growled, weary with repeated failure. "He's here, all right. The Chief wired me he's in this city, and the Chief don't make mistakes. Smoky's always been a fool about dogs. He's right here in this dog crowd tonight—and I can't nail him."

Hardly knowing just what to do, McNain wandered back to the grandstand. Thoughtfully his gray observant eyes strayed over the tiers of people, the brilliantly lighted track, the oval lake in the center, the jockeys parading the next batch of dogs to the starting cages.

Four nights in a row, he mused, and not the slightest progress in nailing Smoky Belger. Some of these days the killer would be moving on, and his trail would be lost completely.

He wondered why Belger, according to authentic data, *always* bet on Number Three dog. Some silly hunch or superstition, probably. Mobsters were like that.

Anyhow, McNain tried to console himself, Dutch Ebdard, the big shot of the racket, had been safely stowed away for life by the Chief's coldly scientific campaign. And Lefty Dill, faced with the same reckoning, had taken a jump through a fourteenth-story window. *They* had been the real brains of the mob, and they had been put out.

BUT this thought, somehow, did not console Agent McNain; he had been dispatched south on Belger's trail and had failed to get the man. To know that Belger was in this town and probably in this very dog crowd, and yet to fail so



flatly at nailing the killer—it was an exasperating spot.

His mind kept running on the enigma of why Smoky Belger always bet on Number Three dog. Even if the habit did spring from mere superstition, the explanation might throw some light on Belger's thought-processes and give a person a lead to work on.

Across the oval lake the electric hare started around the track. Idly McNain picked up a trampled program, glanced at it, at the records of the entries. Number One dog had by far the best showing, and on the board he was a heavy favorite.

An idea sprang into McNain's mind. "I've got it!" he exulted. "I've got it! My watch against a shirt-button, I know why Belger bets the way he does."

Ordinarily McNain took little interest in these dull, cut-and-dried races. But this one he watched closely. When the hare flashed past the cages, Number One dog was away to a two-length lead. Steadily it dropped the main pack behind. At the north end of the track it was yards ahead of the place dog. Running easily, with the effortless grace of a bird in flight, it was a sure winner.

Again McNain left the grandstand, and hurried down to the Number One window. The hand on his automatic trembled a little, and he slipped the trigger safety of the weapon, ready for business.

Through the gallery resounded the loud-speaker announcement that Number One dog had made a new track record. Presently the pay-off crowd came trooping in. McNain looked them over.

His gaze lighted upon a dapper, black-haired individual near the end of the line.

A thrill went through him like an electric shock. He was not dead positive of his identification, but that hair looked unnaturally black, and the man's spectacles had flat lenses—flat as window glass.

He walked up and touched the man on the shoulder.

"Hello, Smoky," he said pleasantly.

In the next split-second his last doubts about the man's identity vanished. With a snarl the man whipped out a blue automatic.

There was nothing else to do—McNain pumped three slugs into him. The man slumped to the floor, his gun clattering on the cement.

AT the hospital the next day McNain brushed past the policeman on guard at the door and entered the neat white room.

"Sorry I had to cut you down, Smoky," he said. "But you asked for it. And the doctors say, anyhow, that you'll live to go back North with me. So all's well that ends well."

The man in bed glared at him. "How the hell did you know I was in that line?"

"Simple," McNain informed. "Pride goeth before destruction. Let me explain you to yourself. You always used to bet on Number Three dog, didn't you? That was because you stood third in the mob, wasn't it?"

Belger refused to answer, and McNain went on, confidently: "Then Dutch Ebbard and Lefty Dill got put away, and that left you Number One man. So, I figured, you'd switch to Number One dog. It was just a hunch, but I played it on the nose—and here we are."

Box Cañon Mystery

By KENNETH PERKINS

Illustrated by Peter Kuhlhoff

SHERIFF HOAG, fat, genial, sympathetic, could not help noticing how big Tom Rexas' eyes burned when he talked about that wolf. They burned with a wilder fire when he told of the giant bone he had brought from the desert mountains of Sinaloa.

"Horse" Hoag, of course, wanted facts. There was the body of Cal Carter in the next room of the office shack; and there was a crowd in the street that wanted to know how Carter was killed. Facts—not love and hate and fear—were demanded; and Hoag was not sure that he was getting them. The one man who knew everything, Tom Rexas, was pretty well shaken up, and his talk was ranting. But when two men go into the desert and one comes back dead and telling no tales, what's to be done except listen to the other?

Tom Rexas sat by the pot-bellied stove, tense, gaunted, a glare to his eyes—the result perhaps of those last days of being trapped and living in perpetual fear. At least that is what one person in the town believed when she looked into those eyes.

Nell Leroyd came to the Sheriff's office with a glass of hot water and whisky which Tom needed badly. She was a slim, tanned, clear-eyed girl who made everyone else in the big office shack look old.

In that crowded roomful Nell was the one who was most vitally interested in what had happened, for she was to have married Cal Carter as soon as he got back from the desert. And he had been brought back—all that was left of him.

He lay on a bench in the little lean-to room adjacent to the office. Everyone watched her go back there and sit alone with him, the lamplight glowing on her lover's dead face. Sheriff Hoag had a lump somewhere under his double chin as he closed the door between that room and the front office. She reminded him of his daughter, who at twenty had become a widow after a Paiute raid.

A group of the town's leading citizens—the veterinarian Doc Pickens, an old assayer called "The Prof," a few of the bigger cow bosses—sat in the room to listen to what was technically a coroner's inquest. In Chloride, as in many Western towns, the coroner and the sheriff were one.

In the search for facts Horse Hoag found a good starting-point in the veterinarian's announcement. Cal Carter had been shot, the slug hitting him across the body, entering at the solar plexus and flattening against the pelvic bone at his left hip. Obviously a shot like that could not be suicide. And there was one more fact. The slug fitted a .45 which the Sheriff had right there on his desk in front of everyone.

EVERYONE watched tall Tom Rexas through pipe-smoke. They watched hard, and listened hard. The old assayer, who was a soft-voiced gentle fellow and certainly the wisest man in town, said: "Tell us this, Tom: Did you go down to the Border to hunt for that borax deposit you'd heard about?"

"I went to find Cal Carter," Tom said excitedly. "I promised Nell I'd find him. You all knew that, before I packed out."

"But you'd heard of the deposit and knew about where it was?"

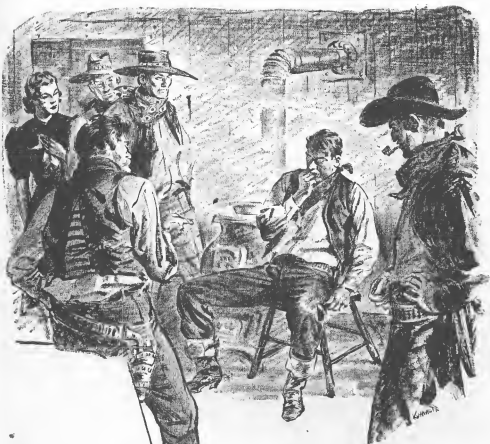
"Sure. That's why I knew where to hunt for Cal."

One of the old ranchers who had come in after the inquest began, asked: "Was Cal Carter already beefed when you found him?"

"No! I've told the rest of these men he was trapped in a box cañon. He'd fallen down a sand wash-out and lost his gun and kept sliding."

"Where was this at?"

"I can't tell for certain. I'd trailed his burro's prints through a lot of gulches and badland cracks till I was plumb lost. I only know that I got home by the N.R.R. of Mexico at that little junction



THE author of "Three Were Thoroughbreds" and "Piping the Devil," here gives us a very unusual and specially interesting story.

called Rincon. The cañon might have been in Chihuahua or maybe Sinaloa."

"Didn't you ask the Mexes who helped you bring Cal to the railroad?"

"They were Yaquis, bronco Yaquis who couldn't savvy what I was talking about. Besides, Cal was dying. What did I care about where we were, except to get him back home? I got on a freight train with Cal, and the bone—"

"The what?" several men asked.

The horse doctor got up. "That reminds me. Tom wanted me to have a look at that bone."

Tom Rexas' eyes had flared as if suddenly heated by the drink he was sipping. The Sheriff had seen the bone out there in the corral behind the loading-platform. It was not packed as field men pack a valuable specimen, with wood splints

and flour paste, but wrapped in gunny-sacks and tossed there as if forgotten.

Sheriff Hoag returned to the subject at hand. "If Cal Carter fell down a sand-chute into a cañon, why couldn't he get out where the cañon opened at the other end? Even a box cañon has an opening somewheres."

"There was a swamp at the open end," Rexas said. "I saw Cal waving to me, and I took a *pasear* around the rim to see what was wrong. I couldn't figure why the swamp stopped him. So I just slid down the sand wash. It was a long slide, past one stratum after the other, each one as clear as the Grand Cañon."

"You slid down a million years," the old Prof remarked. Being an assayer, he was also somewhat of a geologist.

"I had to climb down the rest of the way, and the whole lay-out of rocks changed with each outcrop, and the air grew lots hotter. That's like the Grand Cañon too, the lower you get. The mesquite gave way to palms, then to tree ferns. The bottoms were like one of these pictures the oil-companies get out in their ads, pictures of the world before the Flood. The glaciers never got down that far to change the scenery,

"He was a pretty fierce wolf—a bad one; but I sort of leaned on him for nerve. The wolf and I needed each other."



and I had the hunch nothing else had ever changed it, either. The nearest I've ever seen to that kind of lay-out is back in Louisiana, what with all the swamp palmettoes and Spanish moss, so it looks like another age. But this was different, hot as hell with the blower off, so hot your head knocked like a kettle. And yet Cal had a fire going, a regular barbecue-fire. I couldn't savvy it."

The Sheriff scratched the stubble on one of his chins. "What's wrong with a barbecue?"

Tom Rexas seemed to find the answer a hard one. "Well, he didn't have any hunks of meat to be cooking, for one thing. All he had was mesquite beans and bread and sheep sorrel for seasoning. That's what we had for supper when I got down there."

"You're getting off the main trail, son," the old Prof said. "Why didn't you and Carter pack out? What was the trouble with the swamp?"

"Well, we could have crossed it by wading through a lot of mud washes and

over floating turf and rotten logs. But we wanted to make sure of it before we tried it. We had enough to eat—tule roots and swamp potatoes and such—everything but meat. We wanted a hunk of meat bad, but there wasn't any. A mule-deer fell into the gulch the next day, but we never saw it again. Some sage rabbits fell in, and wild cattle—"

"All in one day!"

"I'm talking of many days. They fell in, and we never saw hide nor hair of them. It got us thinking."

The assayer was thinking too, ahead of everyone else. "You're leading up to why you were afraid of the swamp? Crocodiles maybe, it being a Mexican jungle?"

"No. I never saw a crocodile there. Didn't see anything alive. Everything that got down there was killed right off. But I did kind of expect to see—" He wiped his forehead distractedly. "Well, you start getting funny hunches when your head's throbbing with the heat, and you know you're trapped."

"What kind of hunches?" Sheriff Hoag asked bluntly.

"Those animals that had fallen into the cañon—I had a hunch that something was catching them."

"Is that why you found Cal Carter keeping fires going in daytime? Was it for cooking, or for keeping off this thing you figured was eating the animals?"

"Carter didn't admit that. And I didn't make him admit it. We just kept staring at each other. You see, we hadn't any proof. That is, not until—"

He kneaded his hands, and his eyes slid toward the closed door of the leanto.

"I found a footprint down near the swamp. It was when I was getting some wattles to build an adobe hut. The trees grew in a creek that was dry, so you could see a print in the sand. It was a big print."

"How big?"

Rexas measured with his hands like a fisherman who first estimates his listener's credulity. "I had nothing to measure it with. Anyway, I thought it was only the print of a fossil stuck for a million years in the sandstone."

"Thought you said sand."

Rexas looked cornered for a moment. "I was pretty jumpy at the time. I didn't get it clear that it was sand till the next day. Then I asked myself, how could that fossil print be in the sand, when it was plenty clear the creek had been running with water a few months ago?"

HORSE HOAG and his deputies smiled with the sides of their mouths. This young rannihan must have been in a pretty bad way. Of course he was no scientist interested in fossils, but he was a prospector. And any man hunting colors would stop at the sight of a fossil print, and measure it, and determine the nature of the matrix.

"When you told Carter, what'd he do?" Hoag asked.

"I didn't tell him."

"What!" they all gasped.

"Poor Cal was just about gone by then—I mean up here." He pointed to his forehead. "I never saw fear crumble a man so. Adobe crumbling bit by bit, hour by hour—that's what I saw happen to a man. When I had this first real proof, I knew if I gave it to him, it would finish him. Then I found out that Carter had seen that print himself. I knew it by his eyes—they bulged like a wild bronc's. He had the shakes—and they're awful to see unless you know

it's just rotgut and the bum deserves them. He said it wasn't fair that he had to go around without a gun when I always had mine belted on. He begged me to let him tote it, at least when he went for firewood. I said I'd get the firewood, and he could stick close to me. I wasn't going to lend him that gun. He'd go shooting up every tree-stump or shadow in the cañon, and maybe shoot himself. . . . Shooting yourself is better than just waiting night after night for something to come and eat you!"

The roomful of listeners shoved their cuds from one side of their cheeks to the other. The Sheriff said thoughtfully: "Funny you didn't tell us the first thing you got to town, what you'd seen."

"I didn't see it!" Tom cried. "The cañon was so deep the sun only got in there at noon, and there was that swamp where the thing could live without ever coming out. The fires kept it back there; I was plumb sure of that."

"And you two coots just denned up in one side of the cañon, choosing to stay there indefinite, instead of risking the swamp?" Hoag grunted incredulously.

"We didn't just den up!" Tom almost shouted. "We had it all fixed to pack out any minute. We made wicker-baskets for grub, and a bark bag to hold water. I went down to the swamp alone to see if there was a good way to cross. But I saw the pepper-grass bordering the swamp all squashed in a long trail where something had crawled over it. I can read sign well enough. The bent grass made a shallow trough about four feet wide leading out of the swamp and back again. The grass-blades were moving up back into place while I looked. And maybe you know what that meant?"

Horse Hoag, used to tracking bad men, said readily: "Something had just passed there a few minutes before."

The assayer suggested: "An alligator trail, maybe, as they call 'em back in Louisiana?"



"Those are water trails," Tom Rexas objected. "This thing had come up on dry land. Besides, the track was too big for an alligator." He caught the Sheriff's eyes, sun-squinted and tiny in fat; then he glanced to the assayer next to him. The Prof's eyes were enormous behind strong dusty lenses, but cold as marble. "You don't believe me, do you? Not a man of you!"

They chewed. The Sheriff said dryly: "Do you believe it yourself?"

The result of this question was astonishing: Tom actually looked stumped. "I know I believed it when we spent those hours waiting and planning and plotting how to cross that swamp without that thing catching us. It worked on me like it had worked on Cal. I kept wondering day and night what it would look like. I kept figuring, making a picture of it in my mind. Once when I went near the swamp,—that was at noon, but I had a torch in each hand,—I saw a vine and some club roots at the end. The rains had flooded the swamp so that things were moving. I thought it was a long neck with a horse's head. I was sure of it!"

THE old Prof's eyes narrowed all of a sudden, turning smart. "By grab! I'm beginning to understand!" Over his silver rims he looked at Tom steadily. "Listen, Tom: Did you really see it, or make up something in your head? You said you were dreaming what it would be like—asleep or awake you were dreaming."

Tom made a helpless gesture with his arms. "I don't know! I don't know if I saw it then or not. But I did know that if we tried that swamp, we'd never get across. It was when I figured that out for certain that I decided to trap the thing."

"You—what!"

"I told Cal to stay in a crevice of rock and hole up there with fires outside till I got back. Then I picked out a spot nearer the swamp and lit a lot of big bonfires which gave me time to build the trap. Not much of a trap, just a big boulder that I loosened by digging for days around the bottom rocks that pinned it on an outcrop of the gulch wall. A 'perched' boulder, way up high. I wouldn't have thought of this kind of a trap except that a wolf fell into the gulch."

"Thought they all got caught and et up," Horse Hoag objected.

"But this one ran into the arroyo where we had our regular fires. We had denned up, the way beavers do. You can't get to their house without passing under water first. Our barrier was fire. The wolf should have been afraid of the fire, and of us too, but he was more afraid of that other thing! He came like a dog and skulked at my heels and looked through my legs down into the gulch bed. I took him in as a pet. I wanted some meat, some broiled chops, but I wouldn't have touched that wolf! It shows you how fear will ride a man. It was like finding a long-lost brother—one that you love. And he was a pretty fierce wolf, at that. He was a bad one!"

HE pulled aside his bandana to show his throat.

"See these scars? He was a killer, that wolf! Scrawny and blood-hungry, but scared—so scared he never made a sound or a snarl. Never even gave a moon-howl. I fed him pikimi bread. But he got tired of it. He wanted meat. He got after me."

He readjusted his bandana. The roomful of hard-headed old men was for the first time impressed.

"I knocked him out with the butt of my gun. But I didn't finish him. I wasn't going to eat him. I just couldn't eat him. He was too much like a dog, and I love dogs. So I let him come to, and I fixed up my wounds with rock salt and maguey sap. I even fixed up the wolf, where the gun-butt had cut his head."

"I'd have salted him," Hoag observed.

"Yes, but I wanted him, just as he wanted me. Because we were both scared to death—don't you see that? Cal Carter gibbering all the time was no good to me; I wanted something healthy. The more bronco that wolf was, the more I liked him, and sort of leaned on him for nerve. Get what I mean? The wolf and I needed each other."

"I'd have curled him up. But go on."

"My wounds didn't heal. I was pretty sick. But I forgave the old lobo. Let bygones be bygones, was my way of looking at it. But he was still hungry for something besides mesquite beans. He got after me again. I had to tie him up with a rope."

"Pretty square way to treat a lobo. Where'd you get the rope?"

"Lots of fiber and vines. That's what I used for the trap. But I didn't decide to use it till the wolf jumped me a third

"He was hungry for something besides mesquite beans. He wanted meat. He got after me."



time. "Sorry, old hoppergrass, but three strikes is out," I said. I talked to him like I'm talking to you. So I killed him."

"Good!" His listeners nodded. "He killed the wolf! Hunkydory!"

"I fixed him as bait so the rope would pull the last brace away from the teetering rock. Then I let the fires go out. The next day at noon I went there with my torches. There were a lot of buzzards in the sky. The wolf was still there, but something had tried to snatch him, because the trap was sprung. The boulder had tumbled down. But the thing it hit had got away, wriggled off perhaps like a snake that's cut in half. I could see grass crushed everywhere, and big chunks of adobe broken loose where it had lashed up and down. It had got back to the swamp and the mud channels down there. I knew it was dead, because more and more buzzards kept wheeling down."

"If the buzzards saw it, then of course you saw what they were after," the Sheriff said. "What did it look like?"

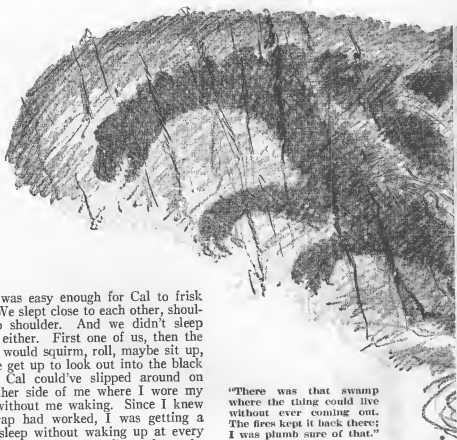
"It was a long time before I found it, there was so much ooze down there. And the carcass must have been pretty well

covered up. It was too dark for me to see anything. Of course I didn't dare trail too near the swamp except at high noon and with a torch. How did I know but that there were other things there like the one I'd trapped?"

"How did you know the one you'd trapped was there?" the old Prof said.

"I went back to Cal Carter and our hide-out. The rains started again, days and days of them, bad rains that put out our fires. And that was the last straw for Cal Carter. I'm not saying it wasn't the last straw for me too. Living there with a madman didn't help my nerves much. When some one else has daft pictures twisting his brains, your brains get to doing the same thing. How do I know what was really happening in that cañon? How can I give any proof? I'm just telling you we were both daft when those rains kept pouring and we sitting in that hole waiting for the sun. With the fires out, we didn't have a hope left in our hides. It was then that Cal got my gun."

Brown lips began to wrinkle, stretch furtively; the eyes of the listeners sidled to each other. But Rexas went on fast:



"It was easy enough for Cal to frisk me. We slept close to each other, shoulder to shoulder. And we didn't sleep quiet, either. First one of us, then the other, would squirm, roll, maybe sit up, maybe get up to look out into the black rain. Cal could've slipped around on the other side of me where I wore my gun, without me waking. Since I knew my trap had worked, I was getting a little sleep without waking up at every stir. But Cal didn't believe about the trap. He couldn't. And I couldn't make him understand. He stuck to the one straight idea, that something was coming to eat him up. Course I woke up right away when he started slipping my gun out. Then it happened. He'd heard something crawling out there in the rain, maybe. Anyway he was crazy wild. He shot himself."

THE roomful of gnarled, burned men was silent and grim. But they kept their gaze focused on Tom Rexas' face.

"You've thought up a good way to explain how Cal Carter happened to be cut down by your gun," Horse Hoag said. "But you forgot one thing. A man don't commit suicide by shooting himself in the solar plexus. Maybe a Jap would do it that way—with a knife. But Cal Carter wasn't a Jap. It don't add up."

"I don't know how it happened!" Tom cried helplessly. "I only know I was fighting with him when I woke up. I was trying to get back my gun. I know Cal was howling that the thing was out there, crawling in the sludge—"

"Listen, Tom," the Sheriff said. "There aint a man in this room will believe that gauzy yarn. If you just talked of a wolf, all right. We know wolves.

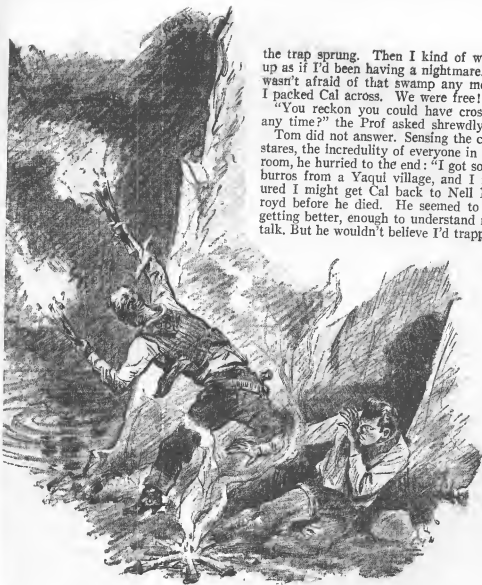
"There was that swamp where the thing could live without ever coming out. The fires kept it back there; I was plumb sure of that."

But making up this critter that all of us know don't exist—"

"How do you know it don't exist?" Tom shot back. "They've found giant lizards off in the Dutch East Indies somewhere, just a few years ago, and they've brought some of 'em to the big zoos back East—lizards that kill horses. Komodo dragons, something like that, they call 'em."

The Prof, seeing everyone turn intuitively for his comment at this point, nodded. "Can't deny it. I've read up about a critter they got in New Zealand, a 'living fossil,' they call it. Left-over, you might say, from Eocene times. You gents know enough about prospecting to know what Eocene means? Well, it's long ago, long before the Utah Indians. Before any Indians. Way back in the Age of Reptiles. We got some of 'em right today. Look at our ornery little Gila monster. Maybe Tom saw a good hefty Gila monster. And then again," he said, sticking to a previous inspiration, "maybe he didn't see nary a thing."

"He's admitted that much," Horse Hoag said, facing Tom down. "You trapped the thing, and even then you admit you didn't see it?"



the trap sprung. Then I kind of woke up as if I'd been having a nightmare. I wasn't afraid of that swamp any more. I packed Cal across. We were free!"

"You reckon you could have crossed any time?" the Prof asked shrewdly.

Tom did not answer. Sensing the cold stares, the incredulity of everyone in the room, he hurried to the end: "I got some burros from a Yaqui village, and I figured I might get Cal back to Nell Leroyd before he died. He seemed to be getting better, enough to understand my talk. But he wouldn't believe I'd trapped

Once again Rexas looked cornered. "I just didn't have time to comb the whole swamp. I had to take care of Cal and fix his wound. He wanted to die, but I doctored him and sat up with him and nursed him. I told him about Nell Leroyd waiting for him. But it didn't help. He wanted to die. It didn't even help when I told him there was nothing more to fear. He was *afraid* to live! Afraid even when I told him I'd found a giant skeleton down in the boulder-wash by the swamp, the bones all picked clean by buzzards."

"You told him that, just making it up to quiet him?" the Prof asked, still mulling over his private explanation.

"No. It was"—Tom's voice turned vague—"it was there. I really saw the skeleton. And I got one of the bones that the giant boulder cracked when

the critter. He said he wouldn't move from his bunk till I proved I'd trapped the thing, and showed him the skeleton—leastwise part of it. You see, he still figured he was in our hole, and the rains were pouring. I thought if I could get him fixed up in his mind, he might want to get well and get back to Nell Leroyd. So I took a burro and crossed the swamp again, and got the bone so as to give him proof. It helped him a lot. He wanted to live now, and get back home. But it was too late. He died on the train just yesterday, like you all know."

"And that's your whole statement?" Sheriff Hoag said. He looked at his deputies and the old ranchers in the room. Some of them shook their heads, which meant that the statement could not be accepted. Others, when the Sheriff touched the handcuffs on his belt,

nodded slowly. And this meant the same thing: Tom Rexas' whole story was a hoax; hence the handcuffs were in order. For if a man cooked up a hoax like this, it meant he must have a reason. Hence he was guilty.

"If that's all, Tom, then I may as well ask this jury to turn in a verdict. But first I'd like to have a little say on my own." Horse Hoag cleared his throat, then sucked at the sludge in his pipe-bowl. "We all know, Tom, that you've been pretty sweet on Nell Leroyd since you were both kids. And Nell wasn't very sure just which one she wanted, you or Carter. She chooses Carter—why, it don't matter to this case, except I understand you had a tiff with her, and she objected to your gambling and helling around. But that aint here nor there. Here's what counts: You and Carter heard from some desert rat about a rich deposit of borax down across the Border. Carter goes first, hoping to get some real money to get married on. You follow him down. You don't tell 'us exactly where you went—which maybe you got a reason. I aint saying right out the reason might be borax and a claim you jumped. But I am saying this: You bring Carter back like you promised the girl, only he's plugged, and with your gun. If you'd told us you'd found him already plugged and dying, and that you'd helped him to the train, we might believe you. But you tell us something which, clear enough, is made up out of your own head. You let your story-telling spread too wide a loop. In plain terms, Tom, it looks to me, and I know it looks to the rest of these men here, that I got to hold you for the murder of Cal Carter."

Tom Rexas' eyes were pale and staring. He gave a slight groggy jerk as if he had been hit on the chin. "I don't know what you mean. Murder—I—Then you don't believe a word!"

He looked at every face and got the same answer, a fixed, rugged squint of accusation. Horse Hoag said: "It don't look like any man in this room, or in this whole town, will ever be horn-swoggled by a story like that. No one's ever going to believe you."

FROM the door of that back room came a voice: "*I believe him!*"

They all turned, to see the straight slim figure of Nell Leroyd. "Tom Rexas kept his promise," she said. "He went down there to the desert to find

Cal. If he hadn't kept that promise, you wouldn't have any case against him—not a grinning, sheep-headed one of you! If he was guilty, he'd have left Cal's body there for the coyotes, and what could you have done about that, Sheriff? What sort of a trial would you have with the *corpus delicti* down in some lost cañon in Mexico? Instead, Tom brought Cal Carter back, as he promised me. And he brought back the gun Cal shot himself with. At least, he would have thrown *that* away!"

"But this yarn of his," Horse Hoag persisted. "It's enough to prove him guilty right there! What's he hiding? What *really* happened? He aint told us. His yarn proves it. He's talked himself right into the rope!"

"WAIT a minute, now," the Prof put in. Professor Ringo was pretty well read in geology. Somewhere in his unknown past he had picked up an education, as everyone knew. Many prospectors came to him to have their dreams substantiated—or else forever broken. He knew what the desert did to men's hopes—and to their brains. "I got something to say which might give you gents a little different slant on what happened to Tom."

"You mean you, of all men, will let yourself be sagebrushed by a prospector's yarns!" Horse Hoag exclaimed.

"Not a bit. I don't believe a word Tom said about that giant critter down yonder. But that don't prove he's a liar. There's been leftovers from the Pliocene, as the books call it. Maybe even from the Upper Cretaceous, although that's too hard to swallow. As Tom himself told us, we've found animals just like the critters of the Reptile Age. Maybe there's more of 'em somewheres in this old world of ours, maybe much larger ones. Who knows? And those washed-out strata going back through the Comanchean and Triassic—I mean by that, gents, the Age of Reptiles—well, they show Tom must've fallen into a pretty old cañon. He built up his yarn well!"

"Sure—but how does that clear him?" Horse Hoag asked. "It just means he's a good liar. But what about it?"

"Sure Tom's a liar," old Prof Ringo agreed, grinning wisely. "Only, he don't know it! He believes everything he says!" And he added, grinning still wider: "He believes it even though he knows he's got no shred of proof there was any such critter in that cañon."

Tom Rexas mumbled an objection: "The buzzards—the skeleton—"

"The skeleton was floated up, thrown up, you might say, disgorged from the swamp because of those rains you told us about. You said they made a flood, and 'things were moving in the swamp.' Maybe this happened many times through the years, a regular thing, a sinking of the skeleton, then a shoving up. The water itself maybe had a preservative in it, like tannic acid. You saw bones that weren't fossilized. They looked to you like buzzards had just cleaned 'em."

Tom shook his head vaguely. He was in a torture of doubt himself; he seemed to be weakening, losing confidence in his own senses. "But the buzzards were there!" he cried. "I saw them! And the trap was sprung!"

The old assayer grinned gently this time. "That's simple enough. Funny the explanation didn't strike you right off: Course you thought of only one answer—the prehistoric critter. You couldn't light on the simplest answer of all. The buzzards got after the dead wolf. It was they, the buzzards and nothing else, that sprung your trap."

Tom's face was blank, his eyes big, beaten. "I thought you were helping me out, Prof. But even *you* think everything I told you is up in my head, dreaming, d.t.'s—and what else!" He rubbed his forehead, struck it. "Maybe—I wonder—maybe it wasn't there!"

"Look, son," the assayer said, touching his arm with a fatherly pat. "I believe you told the truth. You saw what you saw; of course you did! But like you say, it just wasn't there."

THEY all saw Nell Leroyd go to Tom and put her arm around his bent shoulder. She knew well enough that two men like Tom Rexas and Cal Carter would not go berserk with a fear of something they had only conjured up in their heads. They were brave men. Their fear had just cause. Tom's hand went up, groping for hers. She clutched it. It seemed to give him strength. The helpless stare left his eyes. Perhaps that touch of her hand gave him back some faith in himself, faith in his own sanity.

He said challengingly: "Don't think I'll back down on anything I've said, Hoag!"

Horse Hoag's enormous shoulders shrugged. "Then I reckon this inquest

is over, folks. We've heard how Cal Carter was killed. What the Prof says don't clear up the case any more'n to say that the prisoner is lying, only he don't know it. All I can do, if you gents have nothing to say to the contrary, is to hold Tom Rexas for trial." He took the gun from the table and stepped to the safe. "Guess this Exhibit A better be locked up. We all believe the story *it* tells."

AND how about the bone, Sheriff?" A Nell Leroyd asked. They all saw her hands, one holding Tom's, the other stroking his shoulder with such a gentle caress that the old battered cow-men of Chloride could only think of a mother calming a nervous child.

"All right, get the bone," Hoag said. Because of Nell Leroyd's attitude, that forgotten thing in the gunnysacks had assumed a sudden serious import. "The bone's the only evidence the defense can offer, seems like," the Sheriff grunted. "If he can use it to prove that a dinosaur crawled around some swamp in Mexico, maybe a jury will believe him."

"Doc Pickens has it unpacked already, Chief," one of the deputies said. "He's been giving it the once-over."

The horse doctor came in, wiping his mustache after a drink. His sharp eyes picked out the venerable old assayer.

"You know something about these things, Prof," the horse doctor said in a queer voice. "You were telling us about those dinosaur bones they found up in Montana awhile back."

The Prof nodded.

"Well, how old were they, do you figure?"

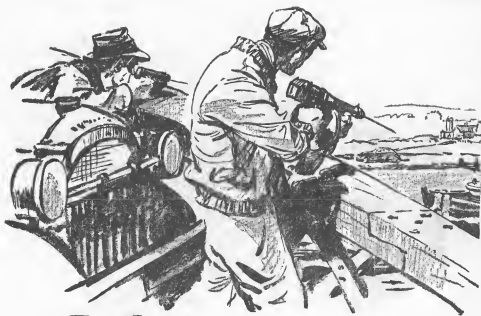
"Plenty old. Go back to the Triassic. The Montana Triassic, they call it. You figure this fossil is that old? Or what?"

"It's a humerus; I know enough about horse bones to tell that. A humerus and radius, and of a pretty big critter. Three-four times bigger'n a horse. And I mean a northern Montana horse, not our little fuzztails down here. It's a giant reptyle, all right. Only, how can it be a fossil bone?"

"If it's a giant reptyle," the Prof said, wiping his thick lenses impressively, "it's a fossil and belongs to the Triassic."

"Which makes it a horse on you, Prof. Unless you can answer this: *How can it be a fossil bone when it still has marrow inside of it?*"

Another out-of-the-ordinary story by Kenneth Perkins will appear in an early issue.



Murder Comes

A swift-paced novel of a newspaper man's adventure with battle, murder and sudden death—by the able author of "Toy D'Artagnan" and "Death Song in Spain."

IDEAS are dangerous things. You can raise more hell with a single idea than you can with a ton of dynamite. That's why newspaper reporters aren't supposed to get ideas. They aren't supposed even to think. Their job is to report what other people think they think, and do it fast, accurately and in plain English—which is just where Peglum Hartness made his mistake. He got an idea about a certain politician and the fire-plugs. He started to think about it, which was bad; and then he wrote that story, which was worse.

Net result: he got fired.

Now maybe the politician was some kind of crook. Maybe he did buy up a lot of old fire-plugs the big city had discarded years ago. Maybe he did paint them and polish them and sell them to the Turnford city fathers for thirty thousand dollars in cash and taxes. . . . So, as Editor Standish remarked forcefully, what? Why bring that up? Why, of all things, drag the Turnford *Examiner* into that? Even at election-time when everybody is slinging mud and it doesn't matter much, it's dangerous to start that kind of a clean-up-our-crooked-city crusade;

but for a paper to run a story like that when everything is quiet and the advertising is rolling in, is just sticking out your chin.

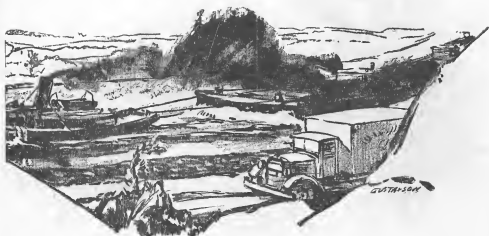
And so Peglum got fired, and this story had a beginning. It was three days after the sad event of his dismissal that Peglum joined his ex-colleagues who remained on the *Examiner* staff in a sort of farewell party which was held in Barney's saloon. Newspaper men are like that. And it was fairly natural that after the fourth or the fifth or maybe the tenth round of upstate applejack, Peglum should stagger to his feet and deliver his own valedictory oration.

Orated Peglum:

"Now listen, gang: this is good-by. Me, I'm leaving this town and I'm quitting newspapers for good. Nobody has any guts any more. You can't write a decent story. Freedom of the press is a myth. You can't work on a newspaper today and keep your self-respect—"

"Yeah," interrupted sports-writer Eagan, an older, perhaps a wiser man, and Peglum's good friend. "And you can't eat self-respect, Peg. Ever try it?"

Peglum ignored the aphorism.



to Buttonville

By FULTON GRANT

Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson

"So I'm quitting," he went on. "I'm goin' out West where things are new and fresh, and I'm going into trade. Maybe the grocery business. I've got a little money—not much but some. My dad left me a couple of thousand. I'm going out West and sell groceries in a small town somewhere—"

Eagan interrupted again:

"Nuts, my boy. Hazel nuts and cashew nuts. No newspaper man ever quit the game. You couldn't do it if you tried. And besides, what about this ad I answered for you?"

"What ad?"

"Well, I cut a clipping out of the '*Business Opportunities*' list the day you got fired, and I wrote an answer. Signed your name. I got a letter back this morning. Oh, well, maybe you don't want to see it. Go sell your groceries, son. Go have your idyl in cheese and crackers—"

"Le'me see that ad!" snapped Peglum.

THERE was a small ripple of mirth from Peglum's ex-colleagues as he snatched the clipping with far more eagerness than one might expect from a determined grocer. Said the ad:

For Sale: weekly newspaper; bargain. Town 7000; circ. small. Good chance for good man; Amateurs abstain.

Box 333 Buttonville, N.Y.

Peglum grinned. "Thanks, Eagan, you're a pal. Is it straight that you answered this in my name?"

"Sure, look at the answer I got."

Peglum opened the envelope. The letter was scrawled, rather than written, on a sheet of ordinary news-print proof-paper—scrawled in blue pencil in a slanting hand suggestive of a schoolboy's.

Dear Sir,

I have your letter. Advise you come here for inspection of plant. Be at this office tomorrow morning at ten-thirty, bringing money.

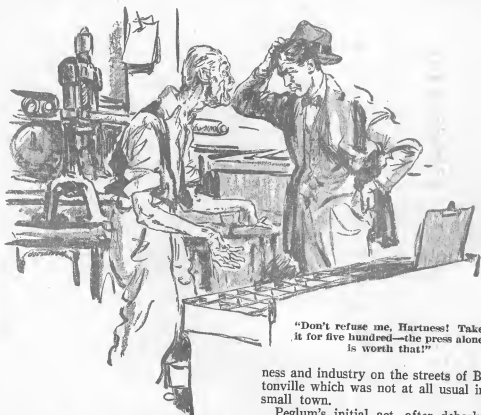
P. Winkoe, Ed.

Buttonville Vigilante

"That," said Peglum, "is too good to be true. It's a fake. There isn't any such paper."

"The hell there isn't! I looked it up," stated Eagan. "It's got a circulation of 508 readers, sworn and notarized. Advertising rates four cents a line. Founded 1897—"

Peglum grinned.



"Don't refuse me, Hartness! Take it for five hundred—the press alone is worth that!"

"Gang," he said, "the new editor of the Buttonville *Vigilante* is buying the drinks. My train leaves around three A.M. Barney, pour some more poison."

IF you have never heard of Buttonville, it proves only that fame does not spread as far and as fast as is commonly reported. By every count you should have heard of Buttonville. Actually you may have contact with Buttonville daily and nightly, for it is no less than a fact—as is boastfully claimed by the long banner which the Chamber of Commerce has hung across the station plaza for all to see, that—

BUTTONVILLE BUTTONS THE WORLD

Buttonville does precisely that; without Buttonville you would be indecent. Subtly and succinctly, Buttonville has insinuated itself into your waking and sleeping life. You wear Buttonville upon your shirts, nighties and pajamas, upon your trousers and unmentionables. Buttons are made elsewhere—in New York City, in Rochester and in Warsaw, New York. But for real devotion to the art and craft of button-making, the busy little town of Buttonville is "the berries."

Peglum Hartness arrived at Buttonville toward ten o'clock. The young morning was crisp, its sunlight crisper; and there was an atmosphere of alert-

ness and industry on the streets of Buttonville which was not at all usual in a small town.

Peglum's initial act, after debarking from his train, was to pass through the station toward the restaurant, where he planned to breakfast. *En route*, however, he stopped at the news-stand and requested a copy of the Buttonville *Vigilante*. The attendant seemed disconcerted, indeed astonished, at the request.

"The *Vigilante*? Oh, yes, I guess they still print it, but I don't believe I have one—don't sell many of them here. Now here's the *Progress*—that's our big paper here. Mighty fine, too."

But Peglum did not want the *Progress*, and it was not until the news-vendor, fearful lest he lose all chance of sale, searched about under piles of magazines and periodicals, that he finally located a crumpled, dirty and badly torn copy of the *Vigilante*.

Peglum paid his five cents and left the stand filled with misgivings. These misgivings were not assuaged at all when, as he sipped his breakfast coffee, he discovered that the paper was only four pages in size, totally devoid of advertising, printed in an uninspiring and antiquated type-face, and written in stuffy, rustic, utterly small-townish language. No wonder, thought Peglum, that this paper was for sale. And yet here was an opportunity—a chance to apply his own years of absorbed knowledge, his own methods, his own editorial craft, and to build this, a totter-

ing rag, into a real newspaper, to rival the Buttonville *Progress* or any others.

Breakfast completed, Peglum took a taxicab and drove to the *Vigilante* offices. They were not, from the exterior, impressive. They were housed in an ancient two-story building of red brick which had once been painted; even the ivy which clambered weakly around it seemed to be looking about for a less disreputable haunt.

ONE does not expect, upon entering the editorial sanctum of even a small-town newspaper, to see a leprechaun squatting on the sacred editorial desk and smoking a cigar nearly as long as his own diminutive arm. Leprechauns are rather associated with crocks of gold, the Green Bogs of Ireland and tales of fey than with the Fourth Estate. But here, nevertheless, was a leprechaun—dirty, bedraggled, ink-stained, with bright red hair and large freckles which fairly covered his wizened little face.

Peglum, accepting for the moment this incongruity, spoke pleasantly to the creature:

"Hello, son," he said. "Where's the boss?"

The leprechaun blew unpleasant smoke in Peglum's face and replied rudely:

"Who wants to know? What's it to yuh?"

Now, Peglum did not like this attitude. Peglum was not accustomed to small boys, and more especially did he lack patience with rude small boys. Moreover, Peglum Hartness was not of a temper easily to accept rudeness from any individual, large or small; and so he reached out with a swift hand, seized the brat by belt and trousers, lifted him from his perch on the desk and dangled him in midair, scaring him so that the cigar dropped from his mouth and fell to the floor in a shower of sparks.

"Listen, you fresh kid," Peglum told him. "You go find Winkoe and tell him Hartness is here. Get it? Hartness—H-A-R-T-N-E-S-S. And if he's not here in two minutes, I'll skin you for shoe-leather. Now get going."

And the boy got going. Peglum heard his feet pounding up a flight of stairs in the rear, and presently he heard them descending again, joined by a slower, less energetic pair of feet. And then a shadow stepped into the room.

Shadow the man certainly was, if Peglum's own figure of speech be permitted. His profile suggested a deflated rubber

balloon. Plainly he had been a big man. Plainly he had been strong and possessed of virile, rather handsome and very convincing features. But just as plainly something had happened to this man, causing the fullness to sag, the flesh to vanish, the skin to hang about his frame like the fabric of a deflated dirigible clinging to its steel skeleton. And his very voice itself seemed tired.

"How," he breathed with that great effort, "do—you—do? Hartness, aren't you? I'm—Winkoe, you know. . . . Won't you—sit down?"

And Peglum, feeling the contagion of the man's fatigue, sank into a chair opposite the editorial desk, and waited for Winkoe to find strength to carry on their interview.

Seated, however, the man seemed to revive a little.

"Why," he demanded, almost sharply, "did you have to leave your job on the *Turnford Examiner*?"

Peglum had scarcely expected this direct query, but decided to be frank.

"I was fired. They didn't like a story I wrote—if it's any of your business."

Winkoe nodded.

"It's my business to see if you're a liar. I'm a liar, Hartness. I don't want this paper to get into the hands of another liar. You wouldn't understand it, but I'm a living lie. I want this paper to be free. I've damned near ruined this paper myself. I'm no good, Hartness. Might have been, but I was a damned fool. I don't want to die knowing this paper will just go on sinking."

"Die?"

"It amounts to that. Now how much will you pay me for this business?"

THIS was too fast—too complex. Personal confessions don't enter into business. The man was crazy to expect Peglum to buy anything on a snap judgment. Crazy, anyhow. Something was wrong with him. Better be careful!

"What makes you think I want to buy it, Mr. Winkoe?" Peglum demanded. "You're assuming too much. How do I know what it's worth? You can hardly buy a copy on the news-stand. It's not exactly popular, apparently."

Seemingly strengthened by resentment, Winkoe rose abruptly.

"Popular, hell! My father founded this paper, Hartness, and he was a great man; but they killed him, Hartness—just as they're killing me. They hated him, Hartness, because he wouldn't play

their dirty games. Then they got me, Hartness—and they'll get you too, if you let them. Popular paper? You don't look like the kind of a fellow who will bootlick his way into a popular success. Popular! Ha-ha, ha-ha!"

The man was obviously hysterical. Better humor him, perhaps.

"That," said Peglum, "wasn't quite what I meant. I mean your circulation and advertising don't seem to be much."

Winkoe was calm again now, and smiling oddly.

"The trouble with this paper, Hartness, is myself. I'm no good. I'm not a newspaper man, anyway. I was a doctor. Did a fool thing and lost my license. However, that's not our affair. The point is, you are going to buy this paper."

"You seem pretty sure. What kind of an installation have you?"

"Come. I'll show you the place."

Peglum followed the man, his enthusiasm for the entire idea seriously dampened by Winkoe's peculiarities. He could not, however, fail to be impressed by the small but complete stereo-plant and type-foundry, by the orderly and glistening "stone" or make-ready table, the copious cabinets of orderly classified hand type, and more especially the huge old-fashioned press, glistening from years of polishing and oiling. There was, however, no one visible in any of the rooms, and Peglum was forced to ask:

"Where's your staff?"

Winkoe gave him a quick stare, then said easily:

"Day off. We print Wednesday morning and distribute at night. Don't need anybody until Friday afternoon. All right, now you've seen the place, what's your offer, Hartness?"

"I'm afraid," said Peglum, "that I'm not rich enough to consider quite so pretentious an establishment."

THIS was true, but it was not the only reason for his hesitancy. He had an inner consciousness of something amiss. But Winkoe seemed not at all dampened.

"Three thousand dollars?" he suggested.

"Not a chance."

"Two?"

"Sorry."

"One thousand, then. Better snap it up, Hartness. Chance in a million."

But as the man sensed the refusal growing in Peglum, a look of fear which was almost panic came into his eyes.

"I don't believe I'd better—" Peglum tried to say, but the man's near-hysteria overwhelmed him.

"Don't! Don't, for God's sake! Don't refuse me, Hartness. Make it eight hundred! Seven hundred! God, man, take it for five hundred—but take it! I've got to have five hundred. Tell me you'll take it! Why, the press alone is worth that."

HIS panic had grown into a sort of anguish. It was nothing short of ridiculous to offer the bare fixtures of this little paper for any such sum as five hundred dollars. It didn't make any sense. The man was crazy, or perhaps he didn't own it. . . . Something wrong, certainly. But if it were a fact, it was the chance of a lifetime. A newspaper man's dream come true.

"Well, Winkoe, at that price, I'd be a fool to refuse you. What's the matter with it? Don't you own it? Is your title crooked?"

Composure suddenly settled upon Winkoe, and he smiled, saying: "No, no, nothing like that. The title is clear."

"Mortgage?"

"Yes," said Winkoe, "there are two mortgages—they amount to a little over two thousand, but they have a considerable time to run."

It was clear to Peglum that no bank or individual would take a mortgage of two thousand dollars unless the property was worth more than five. Whatever the catch was, it could not be that angle.

"At that figure, I'll buy it, Winkoe, if you prove title. I'll give you my check now, but I warn you that you're being a damned fool. Get your witnesses, and I'll sign a bill-of-sale."

Winkoe laughed.

"It's my privilege to be a damned fool my own way," he said. "I have a bill-of-sale in blank. You sign it. I'll have it notarized before witnesses at my lawyers. Make your check payable three days from today,—that's Saturday,—if you don't mind."

Peglum was astonished. "Why?" he asked. "I'll do it, but it seems stupid."

"Probably is," said Winkoe, "but you don't mind, do you?"

Peglum did not mind. He wrote his check, signed Winkoe's bill-of-sale in duplicate, agreed with Winkoe's suggestion that the expression "one dollar and other valuable considerations" be substituted for the actual figure. It did

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not concern the world that Winkoe should be guilty of such folly, or that Peglum should take advantage of it.

Winkoe took the check and the document and started toward the door.

"I'm going to Tom Brink's office—he's my lawyer. I'll get this witnessed and notarized; and in the meantime I will bring you the titles and other documents involved, which he keeps on file for me. I guess you'd rather stay here and look around for yourself, but come along if you want."

Peglum preferred to remain; and when Winkoe had vanished out of the door, he thrust his hands deeply into his pockets and paced the floor frowningly, in a youthful endeavor to convince himself that he had not been guilty of too great haste in submitting to this extraordinary transaction.

"Gosh!" he said aloud, as the enormity of the facts confronted him. "Me, an editor! Aint that sumpin'!"

But his embarrassment was complete when a sudden cackle of laughter burst from behind him, accompanied by a scampering noise; and a red-faced Peglum turned to see the wizened, leering face of the leprechaun-like imp of a printer's devil darting from behind a file cabinet and running through the rear door. At the door, the urchin turned and made with his lips a noise as effectively insulting as it was graphic and undignified.

"Editor!" said the boy. "*Bp-p-p-fft!*" or something approximating those letters. Then he vanished.

FOR a man who has spent years around, among and amidst the odors and accouterments of a news-press, there is no lodestone more compelling than a new and unaccustomed plant where the odors and accouterments have another personality and character. Thus it was natural for Peglum to proceed, as soon as Winkoe's back had vanished to the front and as soon as the rude boy's bare feet had departed to the rear, into the lower depths, so to speak, of this his new acquisition.

A door opened into a black stairway leading down into a cement basement. This, when Peglum had found the light-switch, appeared filled with huge rolls of news-print stock. A quick estimate told Peglum that there would be enough paper there to print the *Vigilante* for years to come—unless the present modest circulation should expand a hundredfold.

There was, he noticed, a hoist—well-oiled and almost new—for carrying the paper from the cellar up to the printing-press floor level, and a chute for conveying it into the cellar from a delivery truck. Odd, Peglum decided. Queer, too, that a paper obviously so poor and so struggling should have so large a fund of paper stock.

That was odd, but his next discovery was more so.

Returning up the stairs, he made another inspection of the press itself, activating some of the moving parts to check on its usefulness. During this inspection—to Peglum's astonishment—he found a package tightly wrapped in newspaper, concealed in the ink-recess. Upon unwrapping this, it proved to be even more astonishing; for the wrapped package contained something hard and solid, shaped a little like an apple, dark gray-white in color, and looking like a petrified fruit or a nut, save for a bright red circle of paint which spotted it in one place. What, he wondered, could it be? And why? Could it have been intended to wreck the press? No, for a saboteur would have used something of iron or steel and would have hidden it in a more delicate part than the ink-recess. Queer thing. Looked like ivory—that was it, ivory. And then Peglum re-



"It was a bullet that got him—plugged him from the back, too."

membered the buttons for which the town is famous. Vegetable ivory. An ivory nut; that was it. But again, why?

Then the phone rang, causing Peglum, like any newspaper man, to jump at the sound of a phone bell and rush to answer.

A man's voice said raspingly: "Vigilante office? Who's talking?"

"I'm new here," said Peglum. "Mr. Winkoe's out at the moment. Any message?"

"Listen, you, I want your name!" snarled the voice. "This is police headquarters. Are you a guy called Hartness?"

"That's my name," Peglum admitted. "But I don't care if you're the head G-man, you can't get tough without telling me what it's all about. What's the matter?"

"You'll learn. You're from out of town, hey?"

"Turnford. Just got in on the ninety-fourty-five."

"Can you prove that?"

"Sure I can. . . . What the hell—"

BUT the door burst open then, and three uniformed cops charged in, one snatching the phone from Peglum's hand and shouting into the transmitter:

"Okay, Chief! Yuh kept him fer us okay. Sure, we'll be right there."

Then to Peglum, as he put the receiver on the hook:

"Get goin', guy. They want you."

"What for? I've got to wait until Winkoe comes back."

"Winkoe aint comin' back."

"My God—you arrested him?"

"Hell, no, buddy. Winkoe's dead."

"Dead! Dead? Good God, he can't be. He was here only twenty minutes ago. Why, it's impossible—"

But the sergeant only replied grimly:

"Yeah, save all that. You'll need it. Get going, son. We're in a hurry."

The police roadster sirened its way down the main thoroughfare of Buttonville and arrived at the Municipal Hall, which housed the police station, in a very few minutes. Peglum was brought into a small office where sat a grizzled, hard-faced fellow in the uniform of a captain. The man waved Peglum into a seat, dismissed the attending patrolmen, and stared at Peglum for several seconds before saying:

"Well, why did you do it?"

"What?"

"Murder Winkoe."

"You mean you suspect— My God, you're crazy. I didn't know Winkoe— never saw him until ten-thirty this morning. You can ask that kid in his office."

"What kid?"

"That freckled-faced brat that works there. He—"

"Oh, that one. He's a half-wit, buddy. His testimony's no good. Keep on talking, feller; maybe you'll say something."

"I can only say what I know. Winkoe took my check and wrote a bill-of-sale. He started out to get the bill notarized at his lawyer's—"

"What lawyer?"

"Brink, I believe he said. I don't—"

"Tom Brink, hey?" He pressed a button, then spoke into a desk phone, ordering an invisible agent to bring the lawyer Tom Brink to the office. Then he returned his gaze to Peglum.

"That's all I know. Brink was to give him the titles he had in his safe, and get some witnesses. If the bill-of-sale wasn't legalized, then Winkoe must have been killed on his way to the lawyer's. Where did they find him?"

"In the hedge near the corner of High Street and the Boulevard—not more than a hundred yards from the office. No, he hadn't seen the lawyer. It was a 22-caliber bullet that got him—plugged him from the back, too. What you know about that?"

"I'll do what I can to help you, but I didn't do it. Why don't you get that half-wit kid and ask him? I was in the office all the time, and the little rat saw me there."

"Rat, hey?"

"Too fresh for his own good."

"Hm-m-m. We looked for young Nutsy—that's his name. But we couldn't find him. We'll have him in later. Now where's the check you said you gave Winkoe?"

"Wasn't it in his pocket?"

"No. How big was it?"

PEGLUM hesitated here. The figure was so incongruous that he knew it would cause comment.

"Why—five hundred dollars."

"What!"

"That's right. Five hundred. Here's my check-stubs."

The officer ignored the check-book but said slowly:

"You wouldn't expect a jury to believe you only paid five hundred for that plant, Hartness. Why, the machinery alone must be worth twice that or more."

"I can't help it. I didn't want to buy the paper at all. Didn't you find the bill-of-sale?"

"Sure, we found that. That's how we got your name. But it had not been notarized, and it only said '*one dollar and other valuable considerations.*' And we found something else, too."

"Well?"

"This," said the Captain. "In your suitcase."

He laid a small automatic pistol on his desk and stared fixedly at Peglum, who could only stare in return and gasp:

"But—but it isn't mine; I never owned a gat in my life. I haven't opened my suitcase since I hit town. I just dropped it inside the *Vigilante* door. I—"

"Okay, okay, feller. Save all that for your lawyer. We'll know about that when we get all the finger-prints."

THE door opened violently then, and a sandy-haired, square-jawed, pugnacious fellow stamped in.

"What the hell are you doing, Bender? You can't pull me out of my office like this whenever you get the mood on. You cops are too high-handed. Now you listen—"

"Shut up, Brink," said the Captain quietly. "There's trouble. Peter Winkoe's been murdered."

"Winkoe murdered! God Almighty!"

"On his way to your office."

"Pete Winkoe—"

"And here's a client for you, Brink. He just bought Winkoe's paper. His name's Hartness."

The sharp gray eyes bit into Peglum's. Tom Brink, whatever else, was keen and alert, and Peglum had a sensation of being sized up and pigeonholed with lightning speed.

"Hartness wants to know if he owns the paper now, Brink. That bill-of-sale was never notarized before Winkoe was killed."

Brink came back like a flash.

"You wouldn't expect me to answer that, would you? Matter for a court ruling. My opinion is: 'Yes, if you can show that you paid him in good faith.' Otherwise it goes to his estate, if any."

"I gave him a check," said Peglum, "but—well, the check wasn't on him when they found the body. Or so the Captain here tells me."

Brink shot a glance at Captain Bender.

"Never trust a cop, Hartness," he said, half-grinning. "They're liars by nature and crooks by trade. Anything

else, gentlemen? I've got people waiting up in my office."

"Maybe yes," said Captain Bender. "Maybe Mr. Hartness will retain you to defend him."

"Defend me? What the—" That was Peglum.

"In case we bring charges," said the officer, frowning a little. "Or for counsel, anyhow. I'm holding you as a material witness, Hartness. Sorry, but that's the way it is. We'll try and make you comfortable here, but I don't know enough about you. Until I can check up on you, I'm taking no chances."

"You can't do that—" Peglum started in, but the officer snapped:

"I can't, hey? Now listen, Hartness: I found the gun that killed Winkoe in your grip, and I'm going to hold you unless Brink wants to go bond for you. So shut up and take it. That's all."

And it very evidently was all.

And as though to emphasize the finality of those words, the Captain made a sign, a patrolman jumped to obey, and presently Peglum was being conducted to the cell-blocks of Buttonville's modern jail, there to be fingerprinted and photographed and left to meditate and to consider the freakish caprices of Fate.

AT the precise moment when Peglum Hartness was being led down the cement and stone corridor of the Municipal Hall to the Buttonville jail, Mr. J. Louis Greshop was in his study, asleep. His fattish face, his pinkish jowls, wore a smile. His definitely paunchy stomach was embraced by his folded hands, while he lounged in the great leather chair. Mr. Greshop was possessed of enough money and the leisure money brings, to yield to the temptation of closing his eyes whenever that temptation should beset him.

But as though the Fates were bent upon tangling the life-threads of the puppet called Peglum Hartness with the other puppet called J. Louis Greshop, at the very instant when the steel cell-door closed upon Peglum and left him to meditate, an interruption broke into Mr. Greshop's cat-nap. The interruption was called Sankey—a tall, gaunt, hollow-voiced individual who, in the household of Mr. Greshop, held the post of butler. Sankey came striding into Mr. Greshop's study bearing in his hands a portable plug-in telephone, while he discreetly coughed, nudged Mr. Greshop gently with his elbow, and said quite loudly:

"The telephone, sir."



"Pops, it never is the moment to discuss anything you don't like. But this is the moment it's going to be decided."

Mr. Greshop grunted, puffed, snorted and eventually roused enough to say:

"Well, pass the blasted thing here, Sankey."

And as Sankey was plugging the instrument into the wall, he spoke so casually that no one could have suspected that he was introducing a grave and ominous tragedy.

"The Mayor's office, sir," he said.

Whereat he handed the instrument to Mr. Greshop, ignored that gentleman's sharp, fully awakened glance, and strode from the room.

"Hello, hello!" Mr. Greshop had a way of saying hello, that made it sound like a challenge to battle. "Hello, there. Who is it? Greshop talking here. . . . Oh, it's you, Purdy. What's the matter. What? *What?* Murdered? Good God, who did it? Who'd kill poor old Winkoe? What's that? Sold his paper? Young chap, hey? Holding him? Well, well, I'll drop over there this afternoon. About four, Purdy. Mind you wait for me. And say, send that boy here to me. . . . What? In jail? You don't think he did it? Material witness? Rot, that's just rot. I'll go bond for him. No, let him come over here. What's that? Brink? That shyster? I'm damned if I will! Now listen, Purdy: I want that boy here. . . . Got it? I want Brink out of this. Hear me? I leave it to you."

And he rang off sharply.

The next act of Mr. J. Louis Greshop was to unlock a drawer in his desk and take from that drawer another telephone instrument, quite plainly a very private wire, of which no member of his household was aware.

Swiftly he dialed a number. Briskly he said into the transmitter:

"Hello, Faslon. Listen. Get me all the dope on a man named Hartness. Peglum Hartness. . . . H-A-R-T-N-E-S-S—got it? Turnford newspaper man. Popped up here this morning. No, I never saw him. Find out if he's a Fed. Sure, use an agency—anything. And listen, Faslon: about that Paris trip. . . . Erica seems a little—ah—restless. Perhaps you'd better hold off for a while. . . . No? Well, it's up to you. Put Dower on, will you?"

A brief pause, and then he snapped:

"Dower? What goes on down there? I thought you had guards who could guard? Another case was taken last night. That's fifty thousand dollars, Dower. That gang has cost us over two million since last November. You and Faslon are responsible, remember. But if you can't run that end, I'll take it over myself or get somebody who can. Got it? Okay, if they want to fight, fight 'em. Police be damned. They've

got nothing on us. I'm shipping Tuesday night. If there's any more loss, you're out. That clear?"

Then he hung up, and closed his eyes again.

But sleep did not return, for another intruder entered Mr. Greshop's sanctum and stalked—the very word—across the thick carpet to plant herself squarely in front of him, saying:

"Well, Pops, how about it? You've been dodging me for two days. Do you call Kurt Faslon off and make him stop bothering me, or do I take it into my own hands? I know he's your associate; but if you don't keep him in his place I'm going to use my own methods. Anyhow, suppose you do lose some money. You can afford it. Now what's your answer?"

It was plain that Mr. Greshop did not like either the tone nor the tenor of his daughter's straight talking. He cleared his throat; he coughed; he wheezed; and finally he said:

"Erica—please, my dear, this isn't just the moment—"

She lifted her fine head high.

"No, Pops, it never is the moment to discuss anything you don't like. But this is the moment it's going to be decided. Maybe you can take those high-handed methods with Kurt and your other yes-men, but not with your daughter, Pops. So you're either going to tell me right now that you'll send him away—tell him to stay away, too—or I'm sailing Monday on the *Carpathia*—and alone."

Mr. Greshop shot his last bolt. He sighed. He looked shaken.

"Erica, dear—I'm so upset this morning. There's been a shocking tragedy—a murder."

She stared. "A murder? Who?"

"Poor old Peter Winkoe."

"Poor old—why, Father, you're nearly maudlin. I didn't think you liked Peter. He insulted you rather well when you tried to buy the *Vigilante*, I seem to remember. But what has Peter Winkoe's murder to do with my Paris trip? I'm sorry and all that, but the connection isn't clear."

GRESHOP was visibly borne down by the weight of his cross.

"Your light attitude is scarcely becoming, Erica. The man is dead. As a matter of fact, there is a slight connection, since you insist. I had rather counted on you to do something for me."

"What?"—challengingly.

"There is a young newspaper man—name is Hartness. He's being held by Captain Bender in connection with Winkoe's murder. He apparently has purchased the *Vigilante*. I'm going bail for the boy."

"Such altruism! I'd never have believed it of you, Pops. And he's the murderer?"

"No—I'm sure not. But I suspect he's something else—a sort of a business spy to watch my operations here. I was hoping I could persuade you to talk with him—use your woman's intuition and check my suspicion."

ERICA laughed frankly.

"Mata Hari of commerce, eh, Pops? You don't really mean it?"

"You insist upon taking things wrongly—but I do mean it, my dear. It could amount to something very important—even ruinous, to me. This young fellow bought the *Vigilante* for a mere five hundred dollars. Winkoe had already refused my offer of ten times that. I want to know how and why. There is more under this than you suppose, Erica."

"I dare say," said the girl. "There generally is more under anything you do than meets the eye, Pops. You're only pretending to be the Public-spirited Citizen of Buttonville. You're only pretending to care about the little mayors and selectmen and town councilors. You're hiding something under that. I don't care much what it is. You're a multi-millionaire, and I'm happy being an heiress. But you should remember that there isn't a person in town who wouldn't cut your throat if he dared."

"Why, Erica!"

"Yes, they would. You've ruined too many people here. Ruined them the way you ruined old Winkoe—"

"Stop! How dare you accuse me—"

"I'm not accusing. You've been very legal, Pops. You would. That's your specialty. But you've ridden rough-shod over too many people. And you'd do it to me—if I'd let you; but I won't. No, Pops, you've tried to worm me around to forgetting about Kurt Faslon. But I won't forget. You want me to play around with some dumb newspaper man to help you out, but you won't even answer me straight about Kurt. Now you listen to me, Pops. If you'll give me your word to send Kurt about his business,—tell him straight and finally that he needn't bother me any more,

—I'll see your Horace Greeley and sound him out. If you won't, I'm leaving for New York this afternoon. Now, that's the way I am."

She lifted her head and flashed in the proud consciousness of her own strength. Greshop squirmed. But he knew that her mind had been made up.

"All right," he said finally. "I'll dismiss Faslon today as far as you're concerned. But it's dangerous, Erica. He'll make a bad enemy some day. He's stronger than you think."

She flashed her eyes again.

"Strong! He's ruthless, if that's what you mean; but Kurt isn't strong. He's only careful. He lives by social codes. He's careful to see that no one ever catches him breaking them—but he's a criminal at heart, Pops. Oh, I know—you think he's just smart. He's as dishonest as any other human, more than most. I wouldn't care if he were a crook, frankly and openly; but—"

"Erica! How can you say—"

"That's the way I feel, Pops. You've made me that way. You've given me too much money, too much travel. I've lost interest in the social graces. No, Pops. I want a man—not a yes-man like Kurt Faslon. And I've no fear of him. Now I've got your promise. Where's your suspected murderer-newspaper-man?"

Greshop made a hopeless gesture with his hands, but brightened again at the chance of a new topic of conversation.

"He'll be here any minute. Have a cocktail?"

"No, thanks. Not if I'm to play spy."

"Mind if I do?"

"No. I just mind that you lie to me so completely."

"I? I lie to you?"

"Certainly. You're concealing some sort of a racket, Pops. Your vegetable-ivory monopoly doesn't pay upkeep on this house. Your local interests are a smoke-screen. Why not tell the little girl? I'm no longer a child."

THEN the tall, morose shadow of butler Sankey drifted into the room, and his sonorous voice said:

"Beg pardon, sir, but there is a policeman downstairs with a gentleman called Hartness. The latter insists you wish to see him, sir."

"Send the cop away," said Greshop irritably, "and the man up here. Hurry, Sankey." The man departed, and the ivory-nut magnate turned a flushed face to his daughter.

"Erica," he said, "let this be understood between us: I give you money—all you want. I make you independent for life. I place no supervision over you. I even have withdrawn my suggestion of Kurt Faslon for a husband—although it would have been greatly to my advantage had you married him; and I ask nothing more for it. Except one thing: leave me alone. I'm a business success because I never confide. I never shall—not even to you. If certain secrets of my business became known, I would die the next day. Now don't let me hear you ever refer to this again. Is that clear?"

Not so much force as fear in the man's voice. Its effect was marked, however; and Erica, swallowing quickly, nodded and said nothing in reply.

Then the elevator-gate slid open, and Peglum Hartness preceded the butler toward the open door of Bishop's study.

QUITE as puzzling as the mystery of Winkoe's death was the odd behavior of the lawyer Brink. Peglum told himself, again and again, that there was something significant in the manner in which Brink fairly evaporated into thin air as soon as Peglum needed counsel. What was it? Something queer.

Peglum had liked Brink at sight. Brink was a fighter. Apparently he stood in no awe of the Buttonville police, from their chief on down. There was very little courtesy and no fear at all in his tone as he addressed Captain Bender. He was blunt and quick. He had plainly sized up Peglum, and, it seemed, favorably. And yet when the domineering Captain Bender had been decent enough to suggest that Brink stand as Peglum's counsel when charges were brought, Brink had patently shied off. Worse than that, he had vanished—slipped away without a word.

But Peglum's reverie was broken by the arrival of no other person than the rusty-haired lawyer himself, almost as though summoned by telepathy to stand in his own defense.

Brink only nodded coolly as the officer let him into Peglum's cell, and waited until the man left them, before saying in a tense near-whisper:

"Hartness, they're framing you—or they were. I knew it, but I couldn't prove it. Now they've lost out, and you're in the clear; but I want to know who would try and frame you."

"Frame me? Why? How?"

"Somebody put that gat in your bag, didn't they?"

"Must have. I never saw it before."

"Well, it was Winkoe's helper—Nutsy Darkle, they call him. Found his fingerprints all over it, and on your bag."

"What's he say?"

Brink suddenly looked the importance of the words he uttered next.

"He can't say anything, Hartness. He's dead."

"Dead!" Peglum started up, at that. "How? Why?"

"Strangled. Somebody strangled him and dragged his body to the very place where they found Winkoe—in the hedge. Did it while the cops were standing guard in front of the office building, too—came from behind the hedge. It's completely screwy, but it lets you out. They can't hold you now."

"I'm all twisted up, Brink," Peglum confessed.

"You and everybody else. Suppose you give me your story—complete, and all you can remember. Twisted up, hey? Well, the idiot sister of that idiot boy is down at the police-station raising hell generally. They're a tribe, the Darkles! Father and mother are drunkards—never sober. Sister is absolutely wild—I mean primitive. She's shot people who went near their house. She's bitten cops. Won't go to school, and that kind of thing. The boy was the best of them all. Winkoe kept him there because he really worked—polished up the press and things as though they were solid gold. But they're both crazy. And the sister is screaming that Winkoe killed the boy—she won't even believe Winkoe's dead. But never mind that now. Give me your story, Hartness. I want to get a line on things."

PEGLUM went through the entire recital, omitting only the discovery of the ivory nut in the printing-press, and the enormous quantities of paper in the *Vigilante's* cellar. These things did not seem important. He ended by saying:

"I tell you, Brink, Winkoe was crazy. Queer. His whole staff must have been queer."

"Staff? That's good. Winkoe did everything alone except clean the press and unscramble the pi. The kid did that. If he told you he had a staff, he was just selling you a paper, feller."

"Why? Why did he want to sell so badly?" Peglum asked.

"I give up." But there was an interruption then, and the uniformed guard called to the lawyer, saying that he was wanted inside. Brink left, promising to return at once; and Peglum was about to seat himself again to contemplate the modified status of things when Brink stepped back and called:

"Don't answer any questions. Hear? I'll fix things."

BUT hardly had the lawyer vanished down the corridor with his policeman, when another door opened nearer to Peglum's cell, and Captain Bender came through, accompanied by a neat little man who wore a black jacket and striped trousers, and who looked the perfect functionary.

"All right, Hartness," said Captain Bender. "You're free. Mr. Greshop has sprung you on bail."

"Who's he?"

The functionary smiled and rubbed his hands.

"Mr. Greshop is our leading citizen. He has gone bond for you, and asked to have you to come to see him at once."

Peglum had already digested enough of queer, unreasonable or unexplained happenings. He said:

"Now, wait—hold on! I'm pretty fussy about who goes bond for me."

"Mr. Greshop," said the functionary from highest Olympus, "owns the other newspaper in town—merely a local hobby for him, of course, and one of many interests. Just why he has interested himself in you, I don't know. Perhaps as another newspaper man—"

"Newspaper man, my eye! I gather this Greshop sort of cracks the whip around here, eh? Oh, well, I'll see him. Now where's my lawyer—where's Brink? He was coming back. I can't go until I've seen him."

The sleek one frowned.

"Everything will be arranged with Mr. Brink. Don't trouble yourself. Everything will be explained to him. Now if you're ready, Mr.—ah—Hartness—"

And Peglum was led out of his cell, through the side door of the corridor and out into the rear courtyard of the Municipal Hall, where a police coupé awaited him.

"You'll do well to remember that Mr. Greshop is one of the most powerful men in the State," said the functionary before the car whirled Peglum off. "He can make you or break you here in Buttonville."

Peglum winked, saying cryptically: "I'll write that down. Thanks."
And then the car rolled away.

TO say that Peglum was surprised at the magnificence of J. Louis Greshop's imported chateau would be to understate. He could scarcely believe his eyes. It seemed almost an impossibility that, in the vicinity of smug, middle-class, sales-minded Buttonville, a thing of so quaint and subtle a beauty could exist. He stared up at the round tower which lifted out of the shorter spires and turrets; he gaped at the lace-work of stone which cloistered an outer stairway, at the arched and vaulted porticoes, and at the fabulous portcullis and drawbridge which belonged no more to this day and age than does the Louvre at Paris or the Blarney Castle. But the car rolled over the drawbridge and through the portcullis, and rumbled into a cobbled courtyard where should have been the clatter of hoofs and the clash of steel instead of the purr of a motor and the odor of gasoline.

The lean butler greeted them at an inner court doorway and bade them wait until announced. Returning, he dismissed the policeman and beckoned Peglum to follow him.

As they passed through a maze of halls and corridors, each hung with costly tapestries, exquisite paintings and delightful wood-carvings, the tremendous wealth of the owner impressed itself upon Peglum. Who, he wondered, was this man Greshop? Persons of such wealth are "news." How could this man have escaped the press, then?

The butler led Peglum to an elevator which took them aloft in a cylindrical tower, stopping finally at a cylindrical room which made the most sumptuous and exotic lounge it had ever been Peglum's privilege to see. His name announced sonorously by the butler, Peglum became conscious of two persons: a fattish, baldish, paunchy, wattle-chinned man of fifty-five or so, in loose, comfortable garb, and a tall, striking girl. Of the two, the girl had the greater force for impressing herself.

Said Greshop:

"Sit down, Mr. Hartness. You've been having bad luck and then some."

Peglum managed to find words:

"Thank you. And let me thank you for going my bail, Mr. Greshop. What made you think I didn't kill Winkoe? I didn't expect to find a friend here."

Greshop flexed the muscles of his flabby lips into something like a smile.

"Hardly friendship, Hartness. Do a man a good turn, and you've enslaved him, as the Chinese say. But you're pretty well exonerated, since that poor boy's body was found. What do you make of it all?"

But before Peglum could form his reply, the girl had broken in:

"You might introduce me, Pops," she stepped forward and added, as she held out her hand in frank greeting: "I'm Erica Greshop, Mr. Hartness. My father has a one-track mind, which probably makes his fortune but is hardly a social asset. Now do tell us what your theory about this murder is. I'm filled with morbid curiosity."

Peglum recoiled just a little. Too smart, this girl. Peglum didn't like that type. Lots of them work on newspapers. . . . Never know quite where you stand with women like that. Not a nose for news, but morbid curiosity—as she said herself.

But Peglum manufactured a smile for the occasion, and managed to reply to both of them together:

"I haven't any theories at all. I don't know anything at all about Winkoe except what I saw of him this morning. I gathered he was a little—er—queer, wasn't he?"

Greshop nodded, but the girl said: "Perhaps that's a good word for it."

Peglum did not press for a definition of this, but went into a recital of events as they had occurred, omitting virtually nothing—virtually, because there was one small omission. For some reason which he could scarcely have explained to himself, Peglum avoided all mention of his odd discovery of an ivory nut in the *Vigilante's* press.

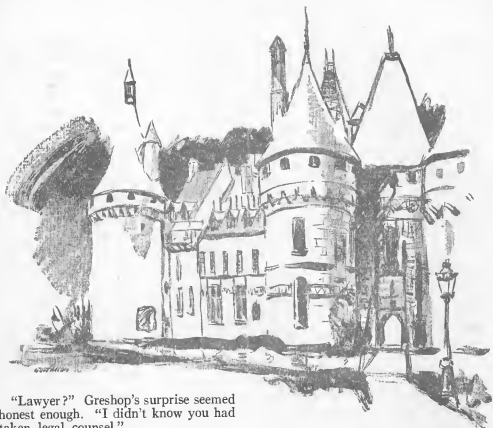
GRESHOP beamed and puffed genially when Peglum had finished.

"Quite an adventure, wasn't it? And now I'm to understand that I have a rival in town, eh? A newspaper rival. You knew, probably, that I own the *Progress*, Hartness?"

"Vaguely, yes," admitted Peglum.

"Well, so now you own the *Vigilante*. A little competition may be a good thing. Poor Winkoe couldn't do much, I'm afraid."

"It's not at all sure that I own it," Peglum said, recalling the ill-fated bill-of-sale and the vanished check. "My lawyer says it's up to a court."



"Lawyer?" Greshop's surprise seemed honest enough. "I didn't know you had taken legal counsel."

"It's Winkoe's lawyer, really—name's Brink. I had no intention—"

Greshop expanded in a loud chuckle.

"Oh, Brink!" he said. "How in the world did you happen to pick him—of all lawyers—"

Peglum resented the implication. He liked Brink.

"What's the matter with him?" he demanded, but Greshop replied easily:

"Oh, nothing at all, except—well, I imagine I would choose quite a different—ah—sort of a fellow if I were held on a serious charge. Something not quite so—ah—rustic. However, if it should come to that, Hartness, I'll see that you have adequate legal advice."

Peglum would have made the formal gesture of thanking Greshop, though his feeling of dislike for him was irresistible, despite Greshop's affability; but the industrialist suddenly rose, saying:

"Why don't you two young people go down into the garden? Show Mr. Hartness around, Erica. . . . Or perhaps you'd care for a cocktail. I'm going to ask you to excuse me for a short time—work to be done here—must be alone for a while. I'll join you presently."

And Peglum found himself spirited into the elevator and carried down the tower to its base, where, across the farther courtyard, stretched a magnificent

replica of some classical geometric garden, a chain of tiny lakes, a swimming-bath of white marble, and a terrace with little tables under canopies.

Erica rang for the butler, and when he appeared, urged Peglum to join her in a cocktail. This he refused.

"Sorry," he said. "But I've got to keep my head carefully. I'm still under suspicion, you'll remember."

She nodded, but it was clear she did not like his abstaining. Conversation between them became suddenly difficult. There was strain and tension. And finally Erica Greshop set her glass firmly down and stared at Peglum with a curious smile.

"YOU are a unique experience to me, Mr. Hartness," she said. "I've never known a man who disliked me quite so obviously and at first sight. It's rather exciting. Would you care to explain your feeling? It would be a good lesson in psychology—for me, of course."

Peglum had not expected that. He didn't dislike this girl. It was a different feeling. She was too smart, and too rich to be so smart. There was something incongruous about her. But he was able only to say:

"It isn't that I don't like you, Miss Greshop. I just don't travel in your

world—and I don't want to, much. I'm a little baffled by you. By your father, too. I don't quite see why anyone should suddenly go bail for a stranger, or why his daughter, who is rich enough and handsome enough to have anything or anybody she wants, should hang around and waste time with that same stranger."

It was a pretty good statement of how he felt, and it had its effect. Erica's eyes grew larger and a little softer as she looked at him, surprised at his frankness. Then suddenly she reached out her hand across the table and took his, shaking it as a man shakes hands.

"I'm glad you said that," she said. "Thanks."

Then she stood up quickly and seemed about to move away from the table when a footstep in the gravel made them both turn, to see J. Louis Greshop waddling toward them hurriedly, and beaming.

"I have good news for you, Hartness," he called out. And coming up, he slid heavily into a seat, saying with puffing interruptions: "First, it's that you're free of all suspicion now."

"That's good. I felt they couldn't keep me."

"I don't—ah—quite know; but I've been informed by telephone that—ah—the police have taken another tack. But the big thing is this, Hartness: Judge Nostrand is a particularly close friend of mine—he is the ranking authority in judicial matters here in the county. I brought to his attention your—ah—odd situation—about the *Vigilante*, I mean. And he has given me an official opinion. Unless some one can show cause why you should not enter into possession, you are the actual owner of the paper, Hartness. If Winkoe had heirs, they could fight this decision in a higher court, naturally. But since he has none, you're the owner. Congratulations!"

PEGLUM'S confusion was natural. It was plain Greshop had brought influence or pressure of some sort to bear upon the judge. Matters like this aren't settled by telephone or in a few minutes. Still, if it was done it was done, and Peglum knew he should be grateful. He spoke his gratitude very honestly and not without a little embarrassment, but Greshop treated the affair as a trifle.

"Nothing at all, Hartness," he said. "Maybe I'm not really a newspaper man, but owning a paper has made me feel—well, close to it. Men of the press stick together and all that, you

know. But—well, I've a proposition for you. Why don't you sell me that paper? Give you a good profit for it, too."

"Sell it? To you?"

"Sure. I've wanted to buy it from Winkoe, and he's refused me. I'll take it over and make the two of them into a daily instead of a weekly. This town can go it. I'll pay you two thousand cash, Hartness."

"That's very—very fine of you, Mr. Greshop," Peglum managed to say. "But I'll—I'll have to think it over. You see—well, this paper has got to be a sort of dream with me—"

"Fifteen hundred dollars is no dream, Hartness. Good sound profit on five hundred, eh?"

"I realize that, but I can't decide now. I'll—I'll let you know, Mr. Greshop."

HE had scarcely said the words before he grew conscious that J. Louis Greshop was deeply angered, and was restraining his emotion only with difficulty. The fat man got quickly to his feet.

"Very well," he said. "Think it over, Hartness. But don't delay too long. I'm not in the habit of making offers like that. Now I'll have Sankey drive you back to town."

Erica spoke then, breaking in quickly:

"I'll take Mr. Hartness back, Pops. I'm driving in, anyhow." And before her father could form a reply, she had locked her arm under Peglum's and was walking him toward the inner courtyard gate where a long-nosed, speedy-looking car stood waiting as though impatient to be going.

"Don't stand on ceremony, Mr. Hartness," she was saying in a low voice not to be heard by her father. "The time to be going is now. Try to understand."

But Peglum did not understand. From the tense hush of her voice, from the haste of her step, Peglum sensed that this girl was trying to warn him against something. Against what? Her father?

In the car, roaring down the parkway toward Buttonville proper, Peglum could not speak the questions which surged in his mind, but when Erica slowed for the first traffic signal as the Parkway merges with Greshop Boulevard and enters the village, Peglum demanded an explanation.

"What's wrong, Miss Greshop?" he asked. "I didn't know your father put such store by the *Vigilante*. I didn't mean—"

"No," she said, cutting in, "you didn't mean—didn't mean to buy it in the first place. Didn't mean to get mixed up in a murder. You didn't mean anything at all. You ought to have stayed away and kept on writing nice little stories for nice little papers, Peglum Hartness. You're playing with things that are bigger than you are. You've got a nice name, too. It would look well carved in granite. I wonder how it would feel to have them throwing earth in your face while the choir sings 'Rock of Ages.' You won't mean to be there; but if you don't get out of this town, there's where you're going to be. I don't know why I'm telling you this. I can't prove it. I'm having a hunch. I know you don't like me, and I suppose that should hurt my vanity. But I can't help it. Maybe I've got a latent mother-complex that I never suspected before. . . . I don't know. I only know that my intuition tells me that you're running in to real danger, and I don't want to see it happen." She stopped the car emphatically, and they ground to the curb.

"Now here we are at the post office," she went on before Peglum could offer any comment at all. "You can find your way any place you want from here—it had better be the railroad station. Good-by, Peglum Hartness. I hope I never see you again."

And Erica Greshop, opening the door of the coupé, even gave Peglum a little push with her hand as though to prompt him by this gesture to heed more quickly the sudden, direct and disconcerting advice she had so surprisingly offered.

And no words had come from Peglum before the car was roaring down toward the plaza, leaving him drenched in the fumes of gasoline and lost in a cloud of vague misgivings.

"Now, that," he murmured aloud, turning toward the Municipal Hall and the police headquarters where his bag was still being held, "is quite a girl. Or," he added slowly, thoughtfully, "is she?"

CAPTAIN MICHAEL BENDER, absolute monarch of Buttonville in all that pertained to the maintenance of law and order, was in an unhappy and uncomfortable mood. In the usually placid community of Buttonville, major crime was unheard-of. There had been robbery, forgery and an occasional bit of willful arson, but downright murder was something which the small industrial-specialty town of Buttonville had never

known in the twenty years of Captain Bender's services. And Bender knew his limitations. He was no rural *Sherlock Holmes*, no specialist in crime detection, no scientific sleuth; nor did he pretend to be. Furthermore, he did not expect his staff of good, honest, simple, country cops to be able adequately to cope with a twofold murder which, look at it as he might, passed from the realm of usual into that of the fantastic.

But the worst of Bender's embarrassment was caused by things not directly associated with the crime. To wit, he had seen fit to arrest and hold on suspicion the young man Hartness. He did not believe him guilty, and the death of the Darkle boy cleared him absolutely; but Bender resented the interference of a man like J. Louis Greshop, who had interfered through the weakling mayor. Nor was that all. Sitting in his office at the moment were two Federal men who had arrived only the night before. They claimed his aid, saying:

"We'll just stay around, Captain. No reason why we can't coöperate, eh?"

THE answer was no, no reason at all. No reason, except that these Federals were from the Narcotic Bureau, and had a fantastic idea of trailing a narcotic-smuggling outfit through Buttonville. Imagine it, narcotics in Buttonville! As if these hicks ever—

But what made Chief Bender unhappy was the casual way this Federal dick called Paisley sauntered into the little private office where the Captain was plotting and tabulating the chances and evidence to get a line on all possible angles in connection with Winkoe's murder. He had sauntered—that was the word for it—with his hands in his pocket and a pipe dangling from his mouth, looking like a college boy.

"By the way, Chief," he said, "we have an idea we can help you a little. Your murder case, I mean. Did you know this fellow Winkoe was a cocaine addict?"

"Good God, no! Impossible. Queer, he was, but no dope fiend."

"Well," said Paisley, "he had a prison record. He was a doctor in Chicago—good practice, too. Clever surgeon. Did some remarkable plastic work during the war. He performed an experimental operation while he was under the influence of cocaine—must have been a real snowstorm; and the patient died. He got twenty years for manslaughter,

commuted to five. You see, Bender, we kind of keep records of that sort of thing. Now maybe that'll hand you a clue or something."

Then he had sauntered out again.

Peter Winkoe a drug-addict! Old Hiram Winkoe's son! Well, that was news. And it put a new angle in the possibilities. But it didn't change the fact that that little brat Nutsy had been killed. Certainly *he* wasn't a drug-addict. Prenatal affliction. Malnutrition. Maybe dementia præcox, but certainly not dope. You can't tie up a thirteen-year-old boy with a dope-ring.

And Bender began his list of points all over again.

IT was the other Federal man who came in now. His name was Stone, Ralph Stone. He was too young to be a cop. The Federal bureau must be crazy to take kids like that and set them out to catch drug-smugglers. But Stone sauntered in, also smoking a pipe, and asked quietly:

"Who's this bird called Brink, Chief? Lawyer or something?"

"That's it," said Bender. "A second-rate lawyer. Been here three years. Handles mostly claims and minor things. Made an enemy of Greshop, though, when he dug up the title on Winkoe's newspaper property and kept it for Winkoe. Seems clever enough, only lazy and grouchy. Why?"

"Well, we don't know. He's not a member of the bar."

"Huh? You mean he aint got a right to practice?"

"That's it. Where'n the world did he come from?"

"Why—I don't know. Never thought to ask."

"Maybe you'd better—or we will. No, you do it, Chief. Wouldn't want him to know that the Federal Bureau is interested."

"Sure—but Brink's no crook. He's a pretty good guy. I'm sure—"

"Well, he's practicing law without being admitted to the bar, or else he's using a fake name, or both. Sound him out, will you?"

First Winkoe, now Tom Brink! What next would they dig up?

But the next modification of Captain Bender's preliminary analysis came from a new source. One of his office men put his head into the doorway, saying:

"This young feller Hartness is back, Chief. Wants his bag and things."

"Send him in," said Bender; and presently Peglum's lanky form came through the door.

"I suppose you'll let me have my clothes out of that bag they planted a gun in?" he suggested, grinning a little.

"Sure. Sit down. Tell me what you're going to do. Better hang around until the case is cleared up, even if I did have to let you go, Hartness."

"I'm staying. Mr. Greshop got a ruling from some judge that the *Vigilante* belongs to me. I'm going to print that paper."

"Mr. Greshop, eh? Well, that's all I've got for you then, Hartness. Sorry, but I'm busy."

Peglum still sat in his chair.

"Well, I've got something for you. I just left Miss Greshop, at the post office.



"It was Nutsy put the gat in your bag. They found his fingerprints all over it."

MURDER COMES TO BUTTONVILLE

She drove me into town. I walked from there to here, Chief, and in that three minutes I noticed something that I'll bet your cops haven't discovered."

"What's that?"

"Ever hear of a New York gunman named Dugalb—Red Dugalb?"

"Sure. We read the papers up here."

"And another called Midge Farjink?"

"Yeah, I've heard of both of 'em."

"Well, they both got into town just now—about the noon train. I saw them coming up from the station. They went into the post office. I used to work on the New York papers when Dutch Slitz was running his beer racket, and they were both gunning in his mob. Never forget a face, Bender. Thought that would interest you."

Very evidently it did, too. Bender sat up stiffly in his chair.

"You absolutely sure?"

"Positive."

"They—well, you're sure they just got in? They could 'a' been the guys that bumped Winkoe."

Peglum shook his head.

"I didn't see them get off that train, but they had bags, and the train was still in the station; and when they came out of the post office, they went to the Commerce Hotel across the plaza. No, they didn't kill Winkoe."

Bender wanted to think,

"All right, Hartness; I'm much obliged. Tell the sergeant at the desk I said to release your bag. I'm glad you didn't have prints on that gun, Hartness—didn't really think you pulled that one, though. Well, so long."

Farjink and Dugalb—New York gunmen of the small-caliber type. Not leaders. Just mobsters. What would they be doing in Buttonville? It was a question that Captain Michael Bender was far from answering.

PEGGLUM HARTNESS' awakening the next morning was one of eagerness and enthusiasm. He had gone directly from the police-station, where he had recovered his bag, to a hotel somewhat pretentiously called Buttonville Towers (the "towers" were of wood and rose to the vast height of ten feet above the second story), which faced the post office across Greshop Boulevard. There he had dined, bathed, and sprawled upon his bed, clad in pajamas, thinking to analyze and classify the extraordinary happenings of his past several hours. Very little classification or analysis, if

any, was accomplished, however, for soon sleep overtook Peglum; and it was not until the hotel's hand-shaken breakfast-gong clattered by his door that he emerged into the consciousness that he was—no matter what the circumstances—owner and editor of a newspaper—a stone, so to speak, upon which he, Peglum Hartness, might carve the record of his life and work.

SO it was a natural thing that Peglum should hasten through his breakfast, snatch a copy of the rival paper, the *Progress*, from a stand, and hurry toward his newly acquired possession.

A uniformed policeman stood on the doorstep, but saluted deferentially as Peglum walked to the door.

"Good morning sir," he said civilly. "The Chief wanted me to stay until ye got here. Maybe there'll be somebody else come down to look around a little—maybe the Chief himself. But it was mostly to keep the crowd away from the place after the murder of poor old Winkoe."

Peglum nodded and the officer left, conscious of duty done.

A rapid, if professionally accurate, perusal of this rival newspaper owned by J. Louis Greshop and ambitiously called the *Progress* confirmed Peglum's worst suspicions. To compete with it would be a herculean task, not for lack of ability or ideas, but rather for lack of the hard cash needed to produce the typical, syndicate-made newspaper so commonly found in the majority of remote industrial towns. The *Progress* was not an exceptional sheet. Its editorials were mediocre, its local column trivial; but it carried five costly comic-strips bought from syndicates, echoes of national news purchased from the Associated Press, and it was printed on twenty-four pages, each black with good well-paid advertising.

Here, Peglum knew, was a challenge. He had no money. He had only an office, a press and his own wits. . . .

Peglum's first act as owner-editor of the *Vigilante* was to take an accurate inventory of stock. It required over an hour to sweep through the morgue, the date-files, the clippings, the bound volumes and the other office paraphernalia, and to list them for future use. Then he descended into the cellar to inspect the wealth of paper he knew was stored there in those great rolls. A plan had been forming in his mind. He would,

he knew, need a considerable amount of paper to materialize his plan. And so, after checking no fewer than thirty great roll-drums of paper,—enough to last the *Vigilante* over two years even if circulation should double,—he set about getting ready a small hand-truck to aid him in hauling one of the rolls to the hoist, thence to haul it again into the printshop for almost immediate use.

Paper in quantity is surprisingly heavy. But the weight of that first roll which Peglum attempted to pry off its perch atop a second roll, outdid anything Peglum had ever known in newsprint. He pried with a crowbar. He tugged and he sweated. He succeeded in moving the roll, causing it to veer toward the two boards he had placed for its descent into his truck. Then with a final heave he forced it to the improvised track, and—it plunged down with a crash; then—

Rolls of news-print are generally forty-eight inches wide and may contain a full half-mile of paper. They are solid and strong. But here, directly in front of Peglum, was the astounding phenomenon of a news-print roll bursting open from the slight shock of being bounced down a short incline of some three feet. Burst indeed! What appeared to be the butt end of the roll had cracked like a butter firkin, and through the office was spilling something that clattered and bounced and clicked like several hundred billiard-balls being dumped onto the cellar floor. And when Peglum retrieved one of the objects and brought it nearer the dim electric light, the exclamation of surprise he gave was no less than justified.

For what he held in his hand was nothing else than another nut of vegetable ivory, identical—even to the round red spot on its dirty white surface—with the similar nut he had found hidden in the ink-roller recess of the big press, wrapped in newspaper.

"I'll be damned!" he said aloud.

FURTHER investigation showed that the broken roll of paper was no more than a blind, a decoy, a hollow drum of wood, covered with paper to simulate the standard news-print roll, and packed full with nuts of the same vegetable ivory. And as suspicion burned him, Peglum inspected each of the other rolls, pounding them with the pry-bar and shaking them as best he could by hand, only to discover that they too, were false, hollow, and presumably filled with vegetable-ivory nuts also.

Here was a curiosity. Here was an oddity. Here was a mystery. And here, also and notwithstanding the thrill of its fantastic nature, was a tragedy; for if these rolls contained no paper, how was Peglum Hartness, new editor of an old paper, to print that first creation which, if his plan should materialize, would shock and startle Buttonville into the purchase of their forgotten *Vigilante*?

HE went upstairs, and dropped into a chair. He sat long and sorrowfully, trying to make sense of his discovery. Why would Winkoe, a former doctor—or so he said—and a newspaper editor, stock his cellar full of ivory-nuts, even cleverly disguised ivory nuts? No answer. Why should ivory nuts be hidden? Weren't they the very essence of Buttonville's buttons? How could there be anything to conceal about ivory nuts—and if there were something about them to conceal, it followed that these must be some especial variety of nuts. It didn't make any sense. Didn't work out, didn't add up. But there was one thing which seemed evident, even if not substantiated; the presence of those vegetable-ivory nuts in the cellar of the *Vigilante* seemed, in some way as yet unexplained, associated with the murder of Peter Winkoe and his young helper. It could be classified as a clue. It could be added to the list of oddities which surrounded the whole double mystery—the panic of eagerness which made Winkoe sell his paper for a mere five hundred dollars; Winkoe's urgency about post-dating the check; the vegetable-ivory nut concealed in the ink-box of the press; and now this store of nuts in the cellar. Add to these things the presence of those two gunmen Dugalb and Farjink, the none-too-subtle warning Erica Greshop had given him, and the eagerness her father had shown to purchase the *Vigilante*, and you had a puzzle that would stump *Sherlock Holmes* himself.

And then, just to make it more complex, some one—presumably the murderer of Winkoe—had killed the little half-wit boy, after the boy, Nutsy, had concealed the gun that killed Winkoe in Peglum's bag. Every detail was a complete *non sequitur* to the next detail—disassociated, unrelated. Or were they all related, through the queer, inexplicable thread which bound everything together with the prosaic, commonplace commercial product, vegetable ivory? It came back to that—to vegetable ivory.

"Well," Peglum decided after long minutes of such analysis, "it's not really my business, except the story I can get out of it. I'd better let this cop Bender know about the fake paper rolls."

And he lifted the receiver, asked the operator for police headquarters, and sat waiting and wondering. So rapt was Peglum in his reverie that he did not hear the outer door of the *Vigilante* office open, did not hear careful footsteps in the outer hall. And the sound of the voice was startling in its suddenness. Barked the voice:

"Reach, pal! Stick 'em up!"

Peglum reached, dropping the receiver to the desk and staring wide-eyed.

There were two men in the room, one a heavy-set, putty-faced Slav with a head shaped like an inverted turnip and evil eyes which were too close together. This one, Peglum knew at first glance, was called Midge Farjink in the circle of thugs with whom he consorted in New York's half-world. The other had red hair and a heavy automatic. The hair identified him, and the automatic made his identity even more convincing than the flattened nose and cauliflower ears which seemed sunken into his head until they resembled fungus growths. This man was the killer, Red Dugalb. Peglum knew it, knew their natures, knew the uselessness of protest. His only advantage was that he knew their faces and identities, whereas such dull-witted thugs as these would not be likely to remember the face of a reporter they had only seen casually, years ago in another city. Peglum reached, grinned, and said:

"Greetings, gents. You don't need the artillery. I haven't a gun. What's on your mind?"

Red Dugalb replied, grindingly:

"Shut up, you. Go case the joint downstairs, Midge; I'll handle this mug."

MIDGE FARJINK's squat body lumbered through the rear door into the composing-room, and Peglum could hear his feet descending into the cellar.

He returned at once.

"Hey," he said, giving Peglum a dark glare, "somebody's bust a case. We gotta make time. The junk is all over the place on the floor."

"Yeah? Gees, the boss'll be sore. I'm taking this punk back, then. You wait fer the truck." Red Dugalb then turned on Peglum. "C'mere, wise guy. You walk alongside me, see? You make a little break, and I plug yuh. Got it?"

You walk alongside o' me and crawl into that car I got parked by your doqr. That's all yuh do. Now get goin'."

The automatic jammed into Peglum's side. Peglum stepped forward. Dugalb bristled next to him, holding his gun in place, forcing Peglum ahead of him through the door and into a big black muddy-fendered car that had been drawn to the curb. The gun prodded him into the front seat, the driver's seat.

"You drive, punk," was the command.

Peglum shook his head. "Sorry," he lied glibly. "I don't know how to drive a car."

A shrill horn sounded behind them at some distance as some other car announced its driver's desire to pass them on the narrow street. Peglum's head started to turn instinctively a little in that direction. Then something exploded against his head, and there was nothing but blackness in his mind.

ERICA GRESHOP was deeply angered. The deep luminous pools of her eyes had grown black with anger.

She stood facing her father in silence, but he knew her thoughts, and his usually stiff, strong manner wilted under it.

She spoke slowly, ignoring Kurt still.

"You don't," she said, "need to explain it, Father. I'll do that now. I want Kurt to know why I'm gone. I want him to know that I asked you, and that you agreed to tell him not to come here. That I despise him. You promised that, Father, and we made a compact—which you broke! You're afraid of Kurt Faslon. He's got something on you—no, keep still till I finish! You were going to sell me to him—not obviously, perhaps, but it amounted to that. But I tell you now, it won't do. I don't want Kurt Faslon at any price. You'll not lean on me, Father. If you've gone soft, I've not. I'm going away and let you face the music alone. I'd have stayed and fought with you, but now you have broken my faith in you and killed my respect for you. Now see if you can make it penetrate into Kurt's conceit that I don't want him. He is morally distasteful and mentally uninteresting to me. Make it clear to him. I don't want to be bothered again by him."

Never once did she look at Kurt Faslon. Never once did she betray by word or glance that she even knew he was there in the room while she discussed him, reviled him. Turning, she walked out of the study, her head high.

And that was a tragic scene, for even as the little elevator dropped down its shaft, Kurt Faslon shot J. Louis Greshop, and he died. A tragic scene because it brought wholesale death and slaughter and warfare into Buttonville. A tragic scene because Erica, being right, had been wrong; being strong had been too strong; being hurt, had been without understanding. Erica had lighted the match with hard words. The flame seared her father; the explosion shook an entire State.

Erica's rage endured, as rage will, fanned by the wind of self-pity. She would go to Europe—she had money of her own. That would punish him!

And the red and black coupé, darting out of the courtyard, boomed across the drawbridge, nosed into the high-road and grew into a blurred streak of reddish brown, moving toward Buttonville at eighty miles an hour. It was good to feel the brakes grip, the wheels slide, skid a little, and slow the hurtling car as she approached the red light at the Parkway and Greshop Boulevard. Greshop Boulevard! Why did her father play this silly game? What did he care for Buttonville? They named streets after him and made him president of the Chamber of Commerce because he had money and power, but they hated him. Greshop Boulevard! What a mockery!

JUST why it was she turned down High Street where the high hedge nearly cut off all vision just before the bend should bring her past the office of the *Vigilante*, she did not quite know. Perhaps it was her wondering about this young Hartness. Would he dare to fight her father's paper? How would he do it? Perhaps if she stopped a moment and looked in—

There was a large black limousine, very dirty, parked in front of the *Vigilante*. It crowded the road. A man, a big-shouldered, red-haired man was silhouetted against the bulk of the car, talking to a man in the driver's seat. Erica sounded her horn, slowed her car, then looked again. It was strange, but there was now only one person in the car—the red-haired man. The other had vanished. And he—she had been quite sure—had been Peglum Hartness.

Then the limousine roared off. . . . And Erica followed, not knowing why—out of impulse, out of a sense that something was irregular. Out of curiosity, perhaps.

The black car ground to the boulevard, doubled the corner, picked up speed even as it approached the center of town, blared its horn, nosed in and around frightened women drivers, startled a patrolman who barely leaped back into safety after holding up his hand to stop traffic, and vanished down Kalaramo Avenue, while Erica, a more lawful driver, stayed behind at the frantic signal of the furious officer. No one in his right mind dashes through a traffic policeman, nearly knocking him over and scaring him out of his presence of mind so that he misses catching even the license number. No one except a fugitive, perhaps. Erica thought of that; she gripped her motionless wheel rigidly, impatient to be off in pursuit of the escaping car, holding her breath, biting her lips. Then the officer waved her on, and the coupé leaped ahead.

KALARAMO AVENUE pours traffic into the State highway toward the Adirondacks. If the black car had taken that direction Erica was sure to catch it. She slipped her foot down, bearing the accelerator nearly to the floor. The power-plant hummed malignantly, snarled, and seemed to pluck the coupé from the road and hurl it ahead. Eighty, eighty-five, ninety—Erica had never in her life driven at such a speed. The nerves at her elbows seemed numb. The wheels caressed only the surface of the road, nearly leaving it to soar into space. But the heavy underslung body, designed for great speeds, held fast, and the red-and-black coupé flowed like quicksilver past the sluggish traffic of the outer road-lane.

Then she saw it. It was only a speck, but she knew it. The black limousine was traveling fast—in the eighties; yet her speedster ate up the distances between them as though the bigger car were stationary. Mustn't warn them. Mustn't alarm them. Mustn't seem to be pursuing. Better to lie back a little and watch without being observed. . . .

And then, suddenly, the black limousine vanished. There had been just an instant that the oncoming traffic crowded Erica and drew her attention more closely to her own immediate roadway. Then when she looked up again, the car was gone. She slowed down, slid her car back to forty miles an hour and coasted. Half a mile farther there was a narrow roadbed, laid in with gravel but not yet tarred, and deep furrows showed that a



Peglum did not hear the careful footsteps; the voice was startling in its suddenness: "Reach, pal! Stick 'em up!"

fast-moving car had recently slewed in to this cutting at a speed which was greater than safety recommended. Erica turned in, and pushed down toward the unknown.

Ahead of her was only one double furrow. Only one car had passed down that road in some time. She grew tense, excited. She threw the low-hung machine around sharp curves, skillfully guessing her skidding distances, and shooting it ahead without having slowed from her forty-mile pace. The road grew darker and it bit into a forest. She tried to guess her approximate location but gave it up. She tried to tell herself that even if she had started this mad chase on a mere hunch, the fleeing car had proved it was trying to avoid her. There must be something wrong.

And then there was a *pop*, and something wrenched her front wheels, snatching the steering-wheel almost out of her hand. She fought it; she fought and stood on the massive brakes; and the car, like a bucking horse, seemed to career, to lift up in the air and to settle down between two great roadside trees. Then there was concussion, the tinkle of glass, a sense of pain all over, and then nothing.

"LISTEN, Chief, somepin's queer at the *Vigilante* office again." It was the voice of Patrolman Flynn speaking to Michael Bender, his captain, from the switchboard. "They put a call through,

see? And then I don't hear nothin' but a lot o' talk in a room, which I don't get at all. So I flash the Central, and she tells me it's the *Vigilante*. The phone's been off the hook fer a quarter of an hour now. Thought maybe you better know."

That was it. That was where Sergeant Case and two men got into the black sedan and went down to the offices of the newspaper which, it seemed, had become so inextricably tangled with the department. A large arched truck was standing in front of the driveway, its motor purring softly, its driver smoking a cigarette; and two men in overalls were laboriously pushing a heavy roll of news-print up the incline of two-by-fours to join other rolls already in the truck.

"Where you going with them rolls o' paper?" Sergeant Case demanded.

"Search me, skipper. Ask the boss inside."

The truck bore the label, neatly painted, of a Canadian paper company. The license plate was Canadian, the truckmen *looked* Canadian. There seemed to be nothing wrong at all—except the direction in which the rolls of paper were moving. Paper, decided Sergeant Case, should be moving *into* and not out of the *Vigilante*.

He walked into the office. A man stood there, marking figures on a pad, wearing a brown derby, smoking a cigar.

"Where's Hartness?" demanded Case. "What goes on here? How come you fellers are taking that paper away?"

The man looked up.

"It's okay, Sergeant. Winkoe didn't pay his bill. We take back the paper. Hartness has gone over to the agents at the Falls. We're only loading one truck in case he gets a break. He's going to try to talk the office into leaving him three rolls."

Sounded right. Made sense. Couldn't put your finger on anything wrong. So Sergeant Case merely said, "Uh-huh," and then added:

"Who called Headquarters on that phone, feller? How come the receiver was off the hook?"

The man frowned, then grinned.

"Well," he said, "that just happened. This Hartness feller is pretty quick-tempered. He was plenty sore when I came in and told him the glad news we was gonna take away his stock. He was gonna phone you fellers to come down and toss us out. Only I—well, I sorta talked him outa that idea. I guess the phone was just forgotten. I hung it up myself about a quarter-hour ago. Sorry if it started things."

That sounded okay too. You couldn't do much about that. You could just see that Hartness lad getting sore, and maybe getting ready to take a swing at the Brown Derby, then trying to get Bender on the wire. Sure, that was it.

"Well," said Case, "get on with it. I'm gonna leave a man here so you don't steal the whole joint on the kid."

"Okay, Sarge," said the man. "That's just dandy."

And Case started back to his car. He strolled again to the big truck, nodded to the driver, made a pretense of inspecting the loading. Watched the men roll one of the heavy drums into place, admired their skill, watched them go back for the next one. Then he noticed a bundle of newspapers wrapped around what seemed to be a shapeless object. He touched it. It was hard inside. He probed with his fingers; they plucked at something round and hard—came out with a vegetable-ivory nut.

"Humph!" said Case aloud, and dropped the nut into his pocket.

Then he detailed one of his men to watch the loading, mounted the sedan, and then drove away.

BACK at headquarters, Sergeant Case was not sure of his story.

"I tell yuh, Chief," he said to Captain Bender, "I wouldn't have thought nothing at all, only fer pickin' up this

nut out of a bunch of newspaper wrap-pin's. Everybody knows Winkoe didn't have no money. Everybody knows he didn't have no credit after a while. Sure, these guys might wanna get their paper back—must be over a thousand dollars' worth of paper on that truck. But what gets me is why do I find an ivory nut—a flock of 'em, too—all hidden in an armful of old paper?"

Bender studied the nut. It was a common nut. It was precisely like the tons and thousands of tons of nuts cut down from the *Phytelephas macrocarpa* of the American Indies and shipped to button-makers. Identical in every way. . . . A round red spot was on the cheek of it, as though stamped for some reason, possibly to signify a classification of size or quality. It meant nothing. It was only a nut. Millions of them could be found in the button-making factories which constituted Buttonville's industry.

"All right," said Bender. "Now get out. Get me a complete report covering Moore's work over at Winkoe's flat, a list of all the letters he found—fingerprints, bills, notes, checks and all that. I want that, and I want you to draft a list of all the facts we've got on Hartness, Brink and on Greshop himself."

"Greshop? You mean J. Louis?"

"Nobody else. Get it, put it in order, bring it here. Now locate those Feds and tell 'em I want 'em, That's all."

It was all, and it was largely bluff. Bender had already compiled his own list of the salient facts concerning Winkoe and his contacts. They got nowhere. They told nothing. Winkoe had not left Buttonville since his arrival five years before, when he was released from prison and came home to help his aged father. There was no mystery about him save only one: the source of his drugs—if, indeed, he took drugs. That was another thing. The autopsy on his body had revealed no actual symptoms of cocaine or other drug. The effects of past use of these seemed to suggest themselves, but the coroner would swear to nothing. And Bender had only the report of the Narcotic Bureau men to show that Winkoe was an addict.

All these things Bender had, and more. His men had nearly taken apart the Darkle family—"the Darkle tribe," as they were locally known—and had found nothing except squalor, drunkenness and a family suffering from ignorance and malnutrition. He was, and he knew it well, stumped. Up a tree.

MURDER COMES TO BUTTONVILLE

But it was highly important not to convey that knowledge to his men; hence the gruff commands to his sergeant.

ABOUT three o'clock Mr. Paisley of the Federal Narcotic Bureau came into Bender's office, dangling his pipe and wearing his odd half-smile.

"Howdy, Chief. You wanted to see us? Stone's busy, so I came along. What's up?"

Bender picked the vegetable-ivory nut out of his drawer.

"That's a common nut of the ivory palm. We use millions of them in Buttonville. It's our trade and bread and butter. The guy who imports them all is Greshop—you know, the rich wind-bag who lives in an imported castle down the road. Well, this one was found in a queer place. There were more, too, but we've got this. I can't find anything wrong with it. You fellers are scientific; I'm not. Now suppose you tell me."

"Tell you what?"

"What's different about that nut."

Paisley looked it over—moistened a finger and rubbed on the red spot, shook it, tapped it, put it down. Then he picked it up again, still silent, pulled a jeweler's glass from his vest pocket, and studied it. Then he pocketed the nut, asking:

"Where d'you find it?"

"No chance, Paisley. You tell me what's queer, and I'll tell you where."

The Federal man thought a moment, then said:

"There may be nothing. Probably not. I want to do a laboratory job on it, Bender. I'll let you know. So long."

Then he left; and there was nothing in his manner to show the excitement within him, nothing except perhaps his eyes, which no one of the force noticed as Paisley hurried through the hallway and out to the street. Once outside, however, his step quickened, and he hurried to his hotel room like a man anticipating a pleasure.

But all that escaped Bender's notice, and he glared at the door as the Federal man departed.

"Laboratory job, huh? What the hell, it aint chemicals!" snorted Bender; and then his phone rang sharply.

"Hello. . . . Who? What? Murder? Who's murdered? Greshop? You mean J. Louis? Who's talking? Oh, Sankey, hey? Well, we'll be right over."

J. Louis Greshop murdered in his own chateau! First Winkoe, then that half-

wit, now the town's leading citizen and richest man. Trouble and more trouble. Reporters from news-services would come flocking—camera-men. Asking impertinent questions, questions he couldn't answer.

This was a job to be handled personally. Michael Bender would like to handle everything personally. He was a one-man force. He only used his twenty cops for the looks of the thing. Couldn't trust them.

The police sedan was roaring down the boulevard again, Bender sitting beside the chauffeur, Sergeant Case and three others behind. Father Bender and his choir-boys, somebody had called them once. Not a bad simile, either.

CONSCIOUSNESS returned to Peg-lum, bringing with it a sense of rapid motion. There was the soft purring of a motor and the swish of air. It grew into his mind that he was in a car. It came to him that the darkness which surrounded him was not night, but rather some cloth-stuff wrapped around his head. Slowly he decided that it was a coat or jacket or some other garment, because of the odor of tobacco which lingered in it. Seconds passed before he was able to decide that his cramped feeling came from being bent over and huddled in the front seat of an automobile, and that the close, warm-feeling bulk near him was the body of a man, presumably the driver. There was agony in his head. There was a moist stickiness oozing into his eyes and feeling wet on his face. He sensed that this was blood. But his hands were free; he tried to heave himself up and straighten out from his cramped position. Then something struck him sharply across the top of his head, all but sending him back into unconsciousness again from the sheer pain of it; and a voice snarled:

"Set still, punk. One funny move outa you, an' yuh get the persuader, see?"

Familiar voice. Familiar language. Ah, yes. Red Dugalb's voice. Dugalb and Farjink. Ridiculously here in Buttonville. Why? Why? City gangsters breaking into a jerkwater newspaper office in a little upstate town. Didn't fit.

Then the brakes screamed. Then the pull of centrifugal force suggested that the car was making a rapid turn; and directly the road seemed to grow rougher, as though they had left the highway and were entering upon a dirt road of



Dugalb, grasping Peglum roughly, ordered: "Come on, youse. Get down. . . . Step out. Keep yer mitts up, see?"

some sort. Perhaps this was Dugalb's plan: run into the woods and— Well, that wasn't very pleasant. But Dugalb was doing something. He seemed agitated. His movements were quick and sudden. It seemed to Peglum that there was, barely audible, the sound of another motor behind them. Suddenly Dugalb jammed on the brake, and Peglum could feel his body strain as though leaning out. Then there was the crack of a revolver, followed, somewhere at the rear, by a smashing sound.

Dugalb drove on, chuckling.

After a short ride the car stopped, and Dugalb called out loudly:

"Hey, boss, things is bust open. I hadda bring this mug along." Then, grasping Peglum roughly and jerking at him. "Come on, youse. Get down. . . . Step out. Keep yer mitts up, see?"

And the authority of this command was a hard, round pressure which Peglum felt in his back. He walked. There was a woody smell in the air. Blindfolded, he could only guess that the hard cement steps led into a house. There was a whispered word, impossible to grasp. Then a door closed, and the jacket was snatched from his head.

"Okay, mug," said Red Dugalb's harsh voice. "Siddown an' shuddup, an' maybe you'll stay healthy. I'll be waitin' fer you outside with a Tommy gun if you wanna try bustin' out, see?"

Dugalb was backing away, still fondling his automatic as though it were a sensitive part of him. Then he vanished through a door, closed it, locked it loudly, and walked away. Peglum could hear his heavy steps pounding the resonant floor.

It was better now, being alone. Better to think. Thinking was important now. Scrambled facts. Things all piecemeal. Now just try this brain-twister, Mr. Hartness. Fold and cut on the dotted line and put this puzzle together: city-gangsters plus a small-town newspaper sold for practically nothing, plus two murders, plus a keen-tongued heiress trying to warn you about something, plus this lawyer Brink warning you again. Add that up, and what do you get? Nothing. Nothing at all—yet something queer. Something—

A key rattled, and the door squeaked open, and a man's figure stood framed in the panel of brighter light.

"Hello," said the man, and the voice was unbelievable, because it was Tom Brink's voice. "Hello," he said, drawlingly. "Just fancy meeting you here, eh?"

PEGLUM stared, and was hardly able to say:

"Good God, they got you too?"

Brink took a long pull on his cigarette, shaking his head.

"Not exactly. This happens to be my cottage."

"Then what the hell—"

"It must seem rather baffling to you, Hartness. There's an element of humor in the situation."

"Yeah? Well, I'm plenty ready to laugh, but I'd like to know the joke. Right now it looks as if it's on me."

Brink nodded. "That's right. It is." Peglum's head cleared and gave him a sudden flash of penetration.

"Well, well, Mr. Bones," he said with rasping irony, "would you be the big bad villain of this picture after all?"

Brink grinned. "Don't get worked up over it," he said. "I'm not really the star, you know, not the prize villain."

"Crook, eh?"

"Not a nice word, Hartness. Come now, I like you. Let's be pally. I've warned you once that you're poking your head into trouble. I didn't have to. What I ought to do now is to let Red shoot you. He gets a real kick out of a neat, well-done murder. I ought to hand you over and forget you, but—well, there is still something of the old sentimentality left in me, I guess."

"CUT the comedy, Brink," Peglum snapped. "What are you after at the *Vigilante*? The nuts in those fake paper rolls?"

"Of course."

"Why?"

Brink grinned again. "What a newspaper story it would make, Hartness! Those nuts are shipped from the West Indies to Buttonville—innocent, simple, profitable stuff, hey? Well, feller, about one carload out of every five of those nuts is queer."

"Queer?"

"Yes. There's a plugged hole in each one of them. It holds a bottle with an ounce of cocaine hydrochlorate in it. It's the greatest smuggling trick on record, Hartness. I wish I'd thought of it myself, but I didn't. So I did the next best thing. I stole 'em."

Peglum stopped him.

"Wait, now," he said. "Wait and let me get it straight. You're telling me that I've stuck my face into a dope-smuggling mess? Who, for God's sake? Winkoe?"

Brink shook his head.

"No, poor Winkoe was only a fall guy. The big shot who organized the greatest cocaine-running outfit in the world is the noble, public-spirited citizen, J. Louis Greshop."

"Greshop?"

"That's the feller."

"And you?"

"Me? I'm the fly in his ointment. He hires me to be transit-man for his shipments around the country from here. But I know a better trick than that. . . . I've got about a million dollars in

Greshop's cocaine hidden away in the *Vigilante's* cellar. I'm taking it out to-day—that's what those men were doing. Everybody's double-crossing Greshop. I have to act fast, or else. The New York crowd are ready to run him out—"

The door burst open then, and piercing screams sounded as Red Dugalb came in carrying a kicking, fighting, screaming girl in his arms. As they stepped through, the girl interrupted her screaming long enough to sink her teeth suddenly and violently into the man's hand as he released the doorknob and tried to take a new hold on her. His big hand descended violently and struck her across the face, jerking her head back sickeningly and bringing Peglum to his toes with rage.

Brink said: "What the—"

"Dugalb let the girl slip limply to the floor and backed away from her, although she was too dazed from the blow to fight now.

"Gees, boss, she damned near kilt me. She was in a car, followin' us, see? So I plugged her tires and crashed her. When I went over fer a look, she climbed me frame, honest she did, boss. Hell, I never seen such a twist."

But neither Brink nor Peglum was listening. Their eyes were wide and fastened upon the girl who was slowly struggling to a sitting position on the floor. Peglum was the first to speak.

"Erica!" he gasped.

Then he snatched her up in his arms.

THE modern industrial town of Buttonville has the distinction of being a port on a barge canal. This was not always so. This distinction dates merely from the advent of that public-spirited citizen, J. Louis Greshop, whose influence, political and financial, was sufficient to cause the construction of an entire new arm of the canal which brought the lock into Buttonville. With the lock, naturally, is a basin or depot, and it is there that, twice weekly, the twelve-barge shipment of vegetable-ivory nuts is brought to feed the waiting mills of the town.

At four-thirty the telegrapher in the little coop at the basin office recorded a message from up the canal confirming for the third time the starting time of the barges. At four-forty another message came through from the next basin town to Buttonville, that the chain of barges had passed through and should, if all went well, arrive in Buttonville with-

in the hour. And at five o'clock a fleet of trucks had begun to assemble, awaiting the barges and their ivory nuts, ready to cart them away to the factories.

It was toward five-thirty, perhaps a few minutes before, when the crowd which had gathered as usual to watch the rather fascinating performance of unloading heard first two distant cracks or explosions, then a distant spluttering or chattering. Then there was the roar of a powerful motor, and a hydroplane came whipping down the canal at a terrific speed, broadsided to a skidding stop, nosed perilously alongside the masonry of the lock, and paused there while a man stood up in her and fired a revolver into the air. Then the roar of the motor and the churning of white foam sent the scudding craft back down the canal and out of sight around the bend.

The effect of those revolver-shots was extraordinary. Two trucks at the head of the waiting line spun their motors. Rifle-barrels bristled from small incisions in their high walls. A man with a machine-gun appeared at the rear of each, and another such formidable pair of weapons leveled themselves at the crowd as the two trucks charged into the open cement runway, nearly running down the astonished pedestrians. And presently they were out of sight behind the straggling trees, and only the roar of their motors could be heard, fading slowly, fading and dying.

Said the crowd, one to another:

"Good God, what can that be? I never heard of such a thing."

EVEN in the Twentieth Century, there is something to be said for a moat, drawbridge and portcullis if you want to keep people effectively out of your house. True enough, an ordinary field-piece would blow your drawbridge and portcullis to bits in a couple of rounds, but you hardly expect your unwanted guests to carry field-artillery in their pockets. Thus a closed drawbridge over a deep, wet moat, is a most disconcerting obstacle to a fast-moving automobile.

And so proved the moat, the drawbridge and portcullis of the imported chateau of J. Louis Greshop when the speeding police car roared down the driveway and barely was able to bring itself to a screaming stop at the brink of the moat where the bridge was lifted, leaving a gap of fifty feet of deep, mucky and very cold water between the police and the chateau.

Captain Michael Bender swore. In his entire career he had never before encountered a moat or a drawbridge.

It was Sergeant who ventured the suggestion:

"Ye'll never get in there at all, Chief," he said with truth. "If there's a stiff, it can wait. I'm thinkin' there's other things goin' on that we ought to take a look at. I'm still wonderin' about them trucks I saw at the *Vigilante*."

Captain Michael Bender swore again, but he knew Case was right.

"Shawn," he said to one of the patrolmen, "stay here and watch. Let nobody in or out. If there's anything that is queer, telephone. If there's nothing at all within an hour, telephone anyhow."

Shawn got down and took a position under the south pylon where the shorn-away part of the bridge still rested. Bender watched him establish himself; then the car drove away. He was a very troubled, very unhappy man.

BACK at headquarters there was more trouble. Waiting in the private office was the patrolman who acted as clerk, holding a voluminous *dossier* of papers, a small black handbag, and divers other incidentals.

"Here's the whole collection of stuff from Winkoe's flat, Chief. I've been waiting for you. There's nothing very much, really, except he had a ticket voucher for a passage on a steamer for the West Indies, sailing tomorrow."

"Tomorrow's Saturday."

"That's right. She sails at seven P. M. Stops at Inagua, Port-au-Prince, Cap-Haitien, Petit Goave, Puerto Cabello and Curaçao, then back again. His ticket only read as far as the Haiti ports, as best I could make out. It wasn't paid for yet—just a reservation-voucher."

"That might account for his wanting Hartness' check dated Saturday. That check ever turned up yet? Did you follow up with the bank?"

"Not a sign of it."

"What else in Winkoe's flat?"

"Just junk. I wouldn't try to call it anything, Chief. Maybe you can get something out of it."

But Bender was not long to have the privilege of quietly musing over his puzzle. His door opened. The suave, tweed-clad figure of Paisley, the Narcotic Bureau man, sauntered in, hands in his pockets, pipe dangling from his mouth.

"Hello," he said genially, but the twinkle in his eye told Bender that this

was no mere social visit. "Caught your murderer?"

"No," admitted Bender. "Not yet."

"Well, maybe I've got something, then."

"Shoot."

Paisley sat uninvited in a stiff-backed chair, puffed thoughtfully, then said:

"That ivory nut you gave me, Bender—quite interesting. Solves my problem altogether. Maybe it casts a light on yours too."

"Well?"

"Well, I x-rayed it. It had a one-inch hole bored in it and a neatly fitted screw-plug that turns flush with the surface. The hole holds a bottle. The bottle is filled with cocaine."

"No!"

"Yes sir. Hydrochlorate of coca—right from Cuba."

"But, that means—"

"Exactly, Bender. We know who imports vegetable ivory—as a monopoly. His name is Greshop—your local millionaire."

"The hell you say!"

"I do say it. We've suspected Greshop for years. We've worked from the New York end—a slick lad named Kurt Faslon is the outlet—and we've traced shipments to this town. We didn't know how they got in, that's all. Now it's clear. Where did you find this nut?"

"That's the queerest part of it. It was on a truck belonging to a paper company, and they were loading in a flock of news-print from Winkoe's *Vigilante*. Said he couldn't pay."

PAISLEY was puzzled. "I don't quite get the picture yet," he admitted. "But we'll figure it out. I'm wondering where your friend Brink comes in."

"Tom Brink? He's all right!"

"Yes? How would you like to know that your all-right Tom Brink used to be the most powerful beer racketeer in the business? Tom Brink is Legs Brinkherhalt, the Chicago—"

"The hell he is. Brinkherhalt is dead. Everybody knows that. He got his in the Fourth of July massacre when Perone's crowd machine-gunned a car full of them."

"That's what you think. The fact is that it was a double who was killed for Brinkherhalt. Legs himself wasn't even in the city. He's pulled the cleverest game of faked identity on record. Had his face altered and his finger-tips grafted with new skin."

Bender shook his head violently.

"I don't believe it," he said. "I've known Brink as a lawyer right here in Buttonville for six years. Damned good lawyer and a good sound man. Little hard-boiled, maybe, but not a crook."

"No? How'd you like to know that Brink's lawyer pose was a cover for his job of routing cocaine for Greshop's outfit? How'd you like to know that Ralph Stone has been working as a truckman for Brink since last year? Got hundreds of snapshots of him. Stone's a clever sculptor—identity sculptor, not an artist. He noticed Brink's fingers were queer, and saw a couple of scars on his face that might be a lifting job. He sent his photos and his plastic work to Washington, and we just got a wire confirming it that Brink is Brinkherhalt."

"Wh-e-e-e-w!" whistled Bender.

"And that isn't all. Brinkherhalt was a lawyer—before he went bad. Had a fine practice until Al Perone bought him for a mouthpiece. He got into a fancy jam and got disbarred as well as arrested for obstructing justice, for perjury and God knows what else. That ruined him."

"God, Paisley, first Greshop, now Tom Brink. You'll tell me Winkoe was in it too in a minute."

"He was, in a way. He did the plastic surgery on Brinkherhalt. I can't prove it, but we do know they were in prison together. Winkoe once was very clever. What I don't see yet is those nuts being in the *Vigilante's* cellar. Of course the paper-truck was phony—that's one of Brink's trucks."

"Brink's? How come?"

"Stone is working on it. But I still don't figure—"

The sentence was cut off by a loud ringing of the desk phone. It was the switchboard office inside.

"Chief," a voice said excitedly. "Hell's bust loose in town. Over by the canal. Scarpatti pulled the riot hook. It's down near the viaduct somewhere on the highway. I can't understand what Scarpatti's trying to say on the wire—he sounds crazy. But there's some shooting going on, and maybe you'd better—"

But Bender was already in action.

TOM BRINK, lawyer, shot his hand into his jacket pocket, lifted it slightly, and sent a revolver-shot crashing into the amazed and unsuspecting Red Dugalb. Brink had said not one word. His eyes had grown suddenly hard and cold. He

shot, watched his man stare, then gasp in a hurt voice:

"Gees, boss—I didn't mean—oh, gees, boss—"

Then Red Dugalb was dead.

"I'm very sorry, Miss Greshop," said Brink. "I assure you this wasn't a part of my plans."

ERICA shook her head, as though a mist were forming over her eyes and she would shake it away.

"You—you *killed* him!" she managed to say. "You murdered him!"

"Don't let it trouble you. He was a killer. Let me offer you my apologies for his stupidity. It won't happen again—as you can see."

"Put me down. Put me down." This to Peglum, who still held her, a little stupefied at the quickness and the cold brutality of Dugalb's death. He let her down. She stiffened. Then she whirled at Peglum:

"So—you're one of them, are you? Then my father was right."

"Not so fast, Miss Greshop," Brink broke in. "He's not the villain in this scene. I am. Mr. Hartness is by way of being my prisoner. I'm afraid you're in the same position for the moment. Be assured that you're quite safe—quite."

Her eyes snapped. "You're a man named Brink. My father knows you're a crook. What's your game?"

Brink grinned broadly and bowed. "Your father should know, Miss Greshop. I'm on his pay-roll."

"Stop it, Brink!" Peglum was bristling. "There's no need to humiliate her!"

He might have said more, had not there sounded a disturbance outside. A shot crashed, then another. The roar of an automobile motor. Then five more shots, rapidly.

Brink sprang to the door, flung it open, swore venomously, leveled his automatic. And at that instant Peglum leaped upon him. The gun roared, but Peglum's body had hurled Brink into the door-jamb. They crashed together, Peglum reaching for the man's gun. A fist crashed into his face, a knee shot pain into his groin, but he clung on. Peglum slugged with all his power, but Brink's head butted forward, striking Peglum full between the eyes, blinding him, benumbing him. His fingers lost their grip on the gun. . . . It would only be seconds now. Peglum waited for the shot—waited—waited. And then Brink's body went limp.



Brink sprang to the door, flung it

There was a scream, another voice calling. A shot sounded—not near, but in the room. Hands were touching him. Strong arms were lifting him. Gradually the light grew brighter, surer.

"Thank God!" said a voice.

He looked up into the eyes of Erica Greshop. A man stood behind her with an automatic—a man in overalls. Brink lay on the floor, bleeding badly from a gash in his head and a bright red patch that was seeping through his jacket.

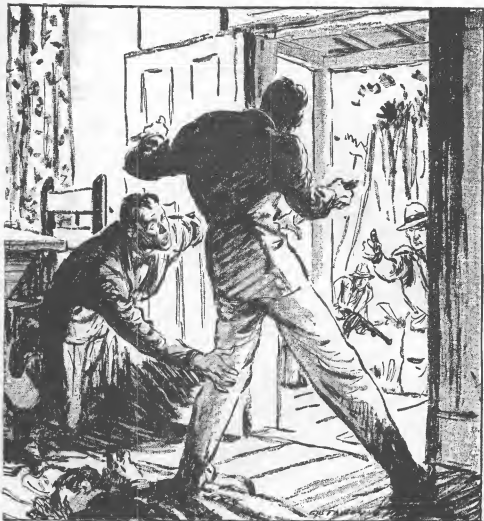
"Thanks," Peglum said. Then to the stranger: "I suppose I owe you my life. If you'd tell me who you are—"

"I'm Ralph Stone, Federal Bureau—but I didn't do it. You've got Miss Greshop to thank."

"Federal man, eh? Then you know?"

"About the cocaine? Yes, I know. I've been on this case for five years."

Erica interrupted. Her face had been strained and frightened, staring at the



open, leveled his automatic. And at that instant Peglum leaped upon him.

prone body of Brink. Now she said, slowly, tensely:

"I—I—killed him!"

Peglum noticed then that there was a student's lamp with a flexible stem dangling from Erica's hand. It was a terrible weapon. He moved toward her, reached for her hand, would have said some word of reassurance to her, but Brink's lips gave a low groan.

"I doubt it, Miss Greshop," said the Federal man. "If he dies, it was my shot that finished him, but I doubt if he dies. That kind are tenacious of life."

Brink groaned again. Stone leaned over him. The wounded man's eyes opened. He whispered:

"It's you—double-crosser, eh?"

"In a way, yes," Stone replied. "Washington has another name for it, though."

Brink sat up, slowly, staring.

"Federal Bureau?" he queried, and then, as though he had answered his own

question, his grin fought the expression of pain in his face. He laughed.

"That's the funniest thing I've heard since I was in short pants. And the joke's on me. I hired you myself. I hired you on account you were a damned good truck-driver. Well, now you got what you wanted, G-man. What about Greshop, that fat—"

STONE'S hand covered Brink's mouth. "We'll talk about that later," he said, but Erica had heard the name.

"You mean—Pops—my foster-father is a crook? You mean he's in some—some racket? Come, tell me. I have a right to know. I've suspected him of something. Tell me! Tell me! I must know!"

She ran to Stone and gripped his arm. Peglum again followed her and tried to lead her gently away, but she fought him off, crying:



ran away with the money to America, and he built up quite a fortune, out of which he replaced the money he had stolen. You see, he wasn't all bad—as you say. We believe it was one of your—your foster-father's associates who inspired the use of his vegetable ivory monopoly as a guise for importing cocaine—”

“Kurt Faslon!”

Stone seemed a little surprised, but nodded.

“Yes, it was Faslon—or so we think. He's not the up-and-coming young man he appears. You've guessed that? You've had trouble with Kurt?”

“Don't let go, Brink,” Peglum called. “Don't give up—we'll get you to a hospital—”

“I want to know about him. I must know about him. I don't care what it is, I must know. Do you hear?”

Brink grinned. “Better tell her. She'll learn soon enough.”

And Ralph Stone, quietly, told her, in as few simple words as he was able.

THERE was a moment of silence. Then Erica said slowly:

“Poor Pops! You will never believe this, Mr. Stone, but Louis Greshop, who is not really my father, but my foster-father, is not a bad man. Weak, yes. A money-power madness drove him. It is a disease with him. But he isn't bad—not really. I can't feel about him as I would my own father, perhaps—”

“I didn't know that he was your foster-father,” Stone said. “That will make it easier—other things, I mean.”

Erica stiffened.

“Can there be anything else? Tell me now—”

“I'm afraid so. Louis Greshop has quite a record—a very curious one. In the first place, he is not an American.”

“Not an American?”

“No. He is Haitian-born.”

“You mean—”

“In a very distant sense, yes. He is the son of a very distinguished family. His name is not, actually, Greshop. His family were bankers, and when he was quite young he stole a considerable sum from their bank in Port-au-Prince. He

“Call it that. He wanted to marry me. I—”

Brink groaned then. It was startling, unreal, horrible. The wounded fellow jerked himself erect, stifled his lips with his hand, and then tried to grin.

“Wait—a minute, folks,” he said haltingly. “Me, I've got a few words—want to say 'em before—” The grin froze. He clenched his fist in a swift convulsion.

“Listen, this is for—Miss Greshop—don't care about—rest. Maybe you can—save Greshop—if you hurry. They're double-crossing him. . . . Everybody double-crosses everybody else—in this racket. . . . Me, I tried too. Now I'm finish—fin—ish—”

Peglum caught Brink's body in his arms, lifted his head up, urged him:

“Don't let go, Brink—don't give up. We'll get you to a hospital—”

The eyes opened; the grin came back.

“What for?” the lips asked. “Don't be funny—Hartness. Listen—don't talk, listen. Give you—newspaper story—best story ever. . . . Couldn't guess who I am—that's story—tell you. . . . I'm Brinker—”

Then he died; his voice faded, as he died, and he did not tell his story.

Peglum let him down.

“I'm sorry,” he said aloud. “I liked him. It was hard to believe he was a

crook, a killer. I wonder what he was trying to tell me?"

Stone said: "I think I know. Those scars on his face—there, by the neck—and those queer finger-tips are concealing an identity. Never mind now; we'd better hurry. Brink's car is behind this cottage. Come, we may have a chance to—well, to save your foster-father's life, Miss Greshop."

And they left the cottage to its dead.

The car was easily commandeered. They nosed out through the dirt path and into the highway. The barge canal, following the lowland, bends and turns and plays tag with the highway all the many miles to Buttonville. At a point some two or three miles out of Buttonville itself the canal makes a horse-shoe curve and passes under a viaduct which leads the highway into the town.

It was just as the bridge came into view of the speeding car that the noise came upon them. It was a distant chattering as though a number of pneumatic drills were busy. But when this was punctuated by short, sharp explosions, an utter bedlam let loose ahead of them by the bridge.

Stone was driving. He jerked the car to the side of the road and ground to a stop.

"That's bad," he said. "I'm afraid we're too late, Miss Greshop. If they've started fighting, then your foster father is a dead man. They wouldn't try it—" A hole appeared in the windshield. They all crouched on the floor.

"Those are Tommy guns and automatics. This is the day a big shipment was due. We—that is, Brink—suspected that Faslon would raid them on the outgoing shipment and take over. He must have changed his plans. It was planned for Tuesday. Brink wanted to act first. I've got to get into this. Hartness, you drive Miss Greshop back and I'll stay here—"

Before Peglum could nod agreement, Stone had dropped down to the road and was darting off into the bushes. To Erica, Peglum snapped:

"Down. On the floor. Here we go—"

And he threw the car in gear to whirl down upon the bullet-sprayed road.

AS they approached the bridge the meaning of Stone's words became clearer. The long, low shadow which had seemed crawling down the canal took the form of a procession of barges, with the heavy black smoke of the tug pull-

ing them wrapped around them like misty silk. This procession was half-way under the bridge. On the bridge was a heavy enclosed truck. A battery of machine-guns was pouring lead down upon the barges and tug, while another motor-van was roaring down the tow-path, spraying lead upon the flank of the boats.

A spent bullet ricocheted against the steel top of the car and Peglum veered. Still another and another spattered. He stopped sharply.

"Erica— You all right?"

Her voice was muffled, but sure.

"Yes," she said. "But you aren't!"

"Huh? Why? What do you mean?"

"You're a newspaper man, aren't you? Isn't this the big story? What are you going to use for money to run the *Vigilante*? Never mind me, I can drive this car as well as you can. You get out and get a story. I'll get home on a wood road that I know. Or are you afraid—"

Peglum glared over the top of the seat.

Then he got down, silently.

"Take it," he said. Then he dashed into the brush at the roadside.

IN the New York office of the A.B.C. News Syndicate, the hours between two-thirty and seven p.m. are, generally, rather dull. The desk men are clicking regularly on their machines, pounding out a few routine bits of copy to prepare the telegraph desk for its evening's rush. Editor Milt Barnes is able, with his door safely closed, to spend a brief half-hour with his feet on the desk, his soul in the arms of Morpheus—as he was doing now.

Then the telephone on the desk of Editor Barnes rang. Barnes blinked, stared wildly, then obeyed his natural reflexes.

"Yes?" he spat crisply into the mouth-piece. "Barnes talking."

"Barnes," came a voice. "This is Peg Hartness. Remember me?"

"Hartness? Ah, yes. You're the bright boy who wanted to run a series of strike articles some years ago and I had to let you go. What is it, Hartness? No jobs open. Sorry."

"To hell with your jobs, Barnes!" said the voice. "I just wanted to know how much money you'll pay for a scoop."

"Scoop? What scoop? I'll give you our regular space-rates against syndicate sales, Hartness. That's pretty good money."

"Chicken feed, Barnes. I said a scoop! Biggest story this year, and ex-

clusive—on account I'm the only reporter here."

"Where?"

"How much cash, Barnes?"

"Five hundred, then."

"Don't strain your pocketbook, Big Shot. I can sell this yarn to the A.P. or U.P. or any other outfit for a lot of money. It's the bust-up of the largest dope-smuggling ring in the country, an eyewitness story, trimmed with battle, murder and sudden death—"

"What's that? Why didn't you say so? I'll give you a thousand, Hartness."

"And what else?"

"Don't be a chiseler."

"No? Well, listen, Barnes. I own a little paper—you never heard of it, but it's a nice little sheet. I'm going to go places with it. I'm going to dominate a whole county upstate. I want your whole news-service. I'll sell you that story for one thousand plus the A.B.C. service for a year."

"You're crazy. Our service is worth five thousand dollars, Hartness. You go to hell and peddle your stuff to some sap who'll fall for it."

"Sure I will, Barnes. Nice to have heard your voice. Well, I tried, anyhow. I did sort of want you to have the break on Legs Brinkherhalt, the beer baron, not being dead at all but being in jail for cocaine-pushing and murder. Well, so long, feller. Be seeing you—"

"Hey, wait!" Editor Barnes rose to the bait. "How much do you want for that story, you chiseler? You know I can't sell the A.B.C. service—"

"Sorry. Good-by."

"Wait. The Old Man's away. I'll try and put it through, Hartness. You start filing that story now."

HARTNESS chuckled. "Not so fast, Big Shot. There's another condition."

"What, you crook!"

"Thanks. I'll give you that story if you'll guarantee not to sell it to any other paper in Winchester County. I want to be the only one to have it up here. I want to get a county-wide circulation tomorrow."

"Okay—just start that story coming through."

"Not yet, feller. I'm waiting for your telegram."

"What telegram?"

"Confirming our agreement, one thousand dollars advance by wire, contract for the A.B.C. service for one year, and an

agreement about that county deal. I'll give you half an hour, Barnes; then I'll sell to somebody else."

"You damned robber, I—"

"Send the wire to me, Editor of the Buttonville *Vigilante*, Buttonville, N.Y. Remember me, Barnes? This is Hartness speaking, Bright Boy Hartness, the youngster you fired because he had ideas."

And that was that.

THAT evening at about six-thirty, every metropolitan evening newspaper in the United States was sending an army of criers into the street, screaming: "Wuxtra, Wuxtra, Wuxtra, allabout big dope-ring bust-up!"

In every newspaper belonging to the A.B.C. syndicate,—four hundred papers with a circulation of over three million readers—the story broke simultaneously. It blazed over the country. It shocked good citizens into indignation; it startled bad ones into a greater respect for the power of Law and Order. But greatest of all its triumphs was the lifting up of an obscure little weekly newspaper, the Buttonville *Vigilante*, with its unheard-of editor and publisher, out of dim oblivion into overnight fame.

And yet, when the first day's smoke had cleared away, Editor Barnes of the A.B.C. Bureau was not satisfied. He sensed, somehow, that he had been cheated. He did not, therefore, send forward the balance of the thousand dollars for which he had contracted the story. Why? For a most curious reason.

Let us, then, examine this world-stirring story. A typical headline was carried over four columns on the New York paper's front page, reading:

SHOTS FLY, 20 DEAD, AS GANG
WARFARE ALONG BARGE CANAL
BREAKS GIGANTIC DOPE RING'S
MILLION-DOLLAR SHIPMENT

There were others and various, but this is typical. Some, indeed, underscored the revelation of a known millionaire philanthropist as organizer and head of this criminal ring. Still others blazed out the discovery of the "dead" Brinkherhalt, noted public enemy of the prohibition régime, alive and actively involved in this cocaine-shipping syndicate. Still others played up the angle of the decoy-shipment of ivory nuts which so successfully camouflaged the actual delivery of the illicit drug into the country, while still others, in their headlines, did a nice professional bit of flag-waving, lauded the

MURDER COMES TO BUTTONVILLE

Federal Bureau, and blazed away at public sentiment.

But though the headlines differed, the story was inevitably the same. Under the by-line of one Peglum Hartness, "Editor-Publisher of the *Vigilante*, Buttonville, New York, and special eyewitness reporter to the A.B.C. News Syndicate," the lead was a masterpiece of thrill-getting copy which read:

Buttonville, N. Y., July 28.—While truck motors roared, machine-guns chattered, bullets whistled, and a State highway resounded with the screams of frightened or wounded men and women and children, the largest narcotic ring in the history of organized crime was ushered out of existence, marking a victory for U.S. Federal Bureau men after a five-year campaign to run illicit cocaine and its traffickers out of the country. Your reporter, standing underneath the bridge where a hail of bullets marked the three-sided battle between the guards of the barges and the two double-crossing factions, witnessed one of the most bewildering sights of his career. When it became evident that the forces of law and order were taking part, the three embattled gangs joined together, precipitating a pitched battle between crime and anti-crime. First the local force from Buttonville, some twelve burly policemen under the direction of Captain Michael Bender, attacked with machine-guns, gasbombs and shotguns. But these were outnumbered, and no fewer than seven were wounded before the State troopers, arriving in three vans, took hand—

SO ran the story. Not a detail was missed. From the strange ascent of millionaire Greshop, the insane power-jealousy of his right-hand man Kurt Faslon, who murdered him and was in turn murdered by the butler Sankey, his body hurled from a window, to the swash-buckling Legs Brinkerhalt, alias Tom Brink, and his hoarding of high-jacked containers of the precious cocaine in Winkoe's newspaper cellar—the whole chain of fantastic happenings and revelations marched down the blistering columns. It was a story dripping with color, reeking with the smell of powder, sparkling with every element of thrill, mystery and triumph of the law that goes to make a piece of fact infinitely stranger than fiction.

But in the mind of Editor Barnes, this was not enough.

The hiatus was discovered, not by Editor Barnes himself, which would have

been bad enough, but by no lesser individual than H. Leroy Packard, founder and president of the A.B.C. and one of the major Furies when his ire was aroused. H. Leroy Packard had been on a vacation. H. Leroy Packard, a man of sixty-two and successful only after long struggling years, loved fishing. He had gone, it seemed, to a small island in the Atlantic off the coast of Massachusetts, there to forget news and newspapers for a week or so, and to catch large marlin or swordfish. So delighted was Editor Barnes with this world-beating scoop which he had purchased during his employer's absence, that he went to the length of causing a selection of New York papers carrying the story to be flown by special plane to Mr. Packard's island, believing that a bit of showmanship with the boss is never amiss.

But Editor Barnes erred gravely.

ABOUT one A.M. his telephone rang, after his weary head had been pil-
lowed for an hour or so. The voice on the wire belonged to H. Leroy Packard, and it was raucous with anger.

"Who the hell is this guy Hartness?" was the question. And after a brief answer had been given, Mr. Packard went on to say:

"Doesn't *anybody* on my blankety-blank news-service staff know the fundamentals of news? My God, Barnes, I pay you more than any city man in the business, and you pay for two big stories and only use one."

"Two stories?"

"Yes, *two*. You got a hot tip, hey? You thought you were smart, hey? So you let somebody sell you a dopey yarn with a lot of trimmings. And right in the middle of that yarn is another—a ripsnorting, human, old-fashioned *Sherlock Holmes* detective mystery that you couldn't land in a hundred years if it wasn't made to order. And you never saw it, Barnes. You don't even know what I'm talking about."

"I'm afraid I don't—"

"Of course you don't. Well, who killed Peter Winkoe? Who killed his half-wit printer's devil? There's your big yarn, Barnes! We want a solution to those murders. The public wants it. You get that solution, Barnes, or you get another job. My God, you wouldn't know a real story if it spit in your face. How-come-I ever put you in charge of that office, anyhow? You go trade a story for the A.B.C. service, and get our sales depart-

ment sore and tangled up, and then you muffle the best part of your trade. You get that Winkoe story, Barnes, or don't come back to the office. I'll give you twelve hours."

And the crash over the wire told Editor Barnes that that was an ultimatum. He sat up in bed, swearing. After ten minutes he crawled out of bed, still swearing. After fifteen minutes more he did what a large number of executives would do—passed the buck, by a telegram, addressed to Peglum Hartness at the *Vigilante*, Buttonville, N. Y. The wire read:

HOWCOME YOU HOLD OUT WINKOE MURDER
SOLUTION STOP YOU GET COMPLETE STORY
ON WINKOE AND DARKLE MURDERS BY FOUR
P.M. OR FORGET ABOUT ABC SERVICE STOP
WHO SAID YOU WERE A NEWSPAPER MAN
BARNES ABC SYNDICATE

ERICA GRESHOP sat staring, white-faced, at the great full-length portrait of her foster-father which hung in the chateau's vast library. It was already broad daylight, but the light still burned. All night she had been sitting there. It was as though she might read, somehow, in those painted features, the softness, the companionship, the goodness which she had known in a man now dead, and whom society had already and soon stamped with shame.

She was alone, trying to reason, trying to plan, trying to grasp and comprehend. Not weeping. Erica was too strong.

It was eight-thirty in the morning. The telephone rang loudly. She rebelled; she would not answer it. No, she had had enough. There would be reporters and camera-men and more policemen. Let them come to her, not telephone. A man had been killed, his very name was dead and strewn in the ashes—and they telephoned!

But her anger was a purge to her soul. Now the tears poured over her face, and she sank down in a silk-clad heap on the rug, sobbing. It was hard for Erica to cry. There had been few tears in her life. And as she glutted her nerves with this great panacea, she did not hear the ringing of the great gong which served to announce a visitor at the bronze portal.

"Erica! Miss Greshop!"

The voice came upon running footsteps, a man's voice, a strong heavy step. "Miss Greshop—good God—"

She looked up into the eyes of Peglum Hartness. Why was he here? Couldn't they leave her alone?

"Forgive me," Hartness began. "I shouldn't have come bursting in like this. But I rang and rang and nobody answered."

"Servants have all—gone," she faltered. "They—they quit."

HE caught her helplessness. "Is there—anything—" she began. She meant, of course: "What do you want with me? Why can't I be let alone?"

"Yes," Peglum said. "But—I don't know. I know what you must be going through. I didn't mean to—"

"What is it?"

"Well, I've been at Headquarters all morning—since five-thirty this morning, really. I've learned that the gun that shot Winkoe—a little .22 automatic—well, it was your gun. They've known it for some time—all yesterday afternoon, I guess."

"Mine?"

"I know you didn't shoot him, but it is your little gun. You bought it in Boston—three years ago. They traced the serial number. The store registered it."

Erica held out her hand to quiet him.

"Boston—yes, I do remember. Pops wanted me to have one—I was going on a trip, with another girl. I bought it at his urging. But—I haven't seen it in years. I never carry it. I'm sure I—"

"Nobody thinks you killed Winkoe, Miss Greshop. It's only that I—well, I've got to find a solution to those deaths, Winkoe's and the boy's. Or else I'm finished here. I'm just licked if I don't. I only wanted to know if you remembered giving the gun away or selling it, or anything. I *have* to know. . . . I'm sorry to come here with all this, but it's—almost life and death with me."

"Why?"

"The *Vigilante*. The A.B.C.—that syndicate I told you about—they won't pay for the story unless I give them the Winkoe murder solution. And I can't. Nobody can. Bender and his cops are completely baffled. Even the two Federal men, they're all twisted up about it. I've got to get a solution for the evening papers or else. They routed me out with a telegram at three o'clock. . . . Honestly, you can't really remember anything about that gun?"

She shook her head.

"I'm terribly sorry," she said. "But I haven't even seen it in years; that's all I can say."

"Oh," said Peglum. "Well, I guess that settles it. Thanks, though. I'll run along

Darkle, screaming, flung himself upon Peglum's neck, pounding, gouging, clawing; calling: "Hey, hey—they're tryin' to frame me!"



—got to do *something*. There are about a hundred reporters from all the papers you can think of in town already. You'll have them out here before long. I've got to get a jump on them. Thanks—Erica."

RECOLLECTION came to Erica about two o'clock that afternoon. It had been a harrowing day. The press had come to the chateau. The press had all but absorbed the chateau. It was the press which was responsible for Erica's sudden remembrance. Rude, they were—rude and brutal and aggravating. "How much of this crooked money did your—did Greshop give to charity?" That was a question. "What are you going to do with your own money, now that you know where it came from?" There was another. And: "Did you know that every gram of cocaine sold illicitly is worth fifty bundles of clothes handed out by the Red Cross and other organizations like that? You've got a grand chance to make a gesture, Miss Greshop." That was the

worst of all. That man's whole manner was a sneer. She had left them, then. Left and went upstairs and locked herself in her own apartment, and flung herself on the bed.

Then the memory came. "Charities—money—bundles of clothes—" Suggestive words, those. Call him a crook, call him what you please, but he gave generously. Think of the good works he had done, right there in Buttonville—and no publicity, nothing obvious. Almost every week he had sent clothes and food to needy people. Sankey had charge of that. Why, that very Darkle family—

And then she remembered. That would be it, of course. That *must* be it. She would have to get away from the reporters. She would have to sneak out. That would be easy; there were half a dozen secret passages, doors, concealed gates, all leading into the courtyard. If she could only get across the bridge—

She managed it, somehow. She could hear the reporters calling for her, shout-

ing, threatening their petty blackmail, demanding their interviews, storming and fuming and running through the maze of corridors. She could hear them, but they couldn't see her. They only saw her car, heard it roaring over the bridge. Let them follow her if they could!

IT took fully seven minutes' fast driving to get into Buttonville, and another five minutes to work through traffic to the Municipal Hall and the police headquarters. The police were considerate.

"You wish to speak with Sankey? It's a little irregular, Miss Greshop, but it can be arranged. If you'll wait a moment, I'll try—"

Sankey sat alone in his cell, dejectedly, his head hanging. When Erica came in, he stood up stiffly. Habit was strong on him.

"Good afternoon, Miss Erica," he said bravely, and then: "A terrible thing, miss. A most awful thing indeed, miss. I shouldn't wonder if I were to go to the chair for it, too. But I couldn't see that—that Kurt person, miss—kill the master and do nothing about it. It's good to see you, miss. Are the servants doing well for you in this time of your trouble?"

Erica's smile was ironical.

"They've all quit, Sankey," she said, but added, as she saw the shocked consternation on his face: "But never mind. It doesn't matter. I sha'n't need them any more. I'm not going to live that way. I'm giving up all my money, Sankey. I'm going to take a job—"

"Good grief, miss! You can't mean it!"

"I do mean it, Sankey; but what I came for is quite different. Do you remember the time you sent a large bundle of things over to the Darkles—that poor family—"

"Quite, miss. I recall it very well. I remember the old fellow—a very disagreeable sort he was, too."

"He would be. But do you remember what was in those things? Clothes—old suits of Pops'. Food—a fish-pole, I think, and a reel—things Mr. Greshop had replaced. I remember there was some talk about helping the old fellow—"

"Quite, miss. I remember it well."

"Well—" How she hated to ask this!

"Well, Sankey, that little pistol of mine—the one I got in Boston. Was that with those things? Did you send it along because it was near the Fourth of July last year—with some blanks?"

"Indeed I did, miss. I remember distinctly— My God!"

The exclamation was a natural thing, for Sankey had scarcely formed his affirmative before Erica had so far forgotten her dignity of an employer to a servant as to throw her arms around the man and kiss him quickly upon the brow. Then she dashed from his cell, all but knocking the guard over in her flight, and fairly flew out of the police station.

The coupé's motor could still roar, though the sprightly body was badly bent and battered from its smash into the tree on the previous day. But roar it could, and it roared down Greshop Boulevard to High Street.

Peglum Hartness was slouched at his new though now useless editorial desk, watching sadly the minutes tick away on the wall clock, filled with dejection. Even the bursting open of his outer door scarcely aroused him. But when a cyclone in silk swept into the editorial office and an excited voice called out:

"Peg—hurry—come on—I've got it!"

He stared up at Erica.

"What? What have you got?"

"The murderer, you fool. Come on!"

That was the electric word. It didn't matter that there was no proof. They believed it. And as the car sped, breaking all traffic laws, to the dump heap where the Darkle tribe had its dwelling—as they sped so, this belief grew and waxed and made them glad. They *had* to be right. There was no other way possible.

OLD Darkle wasn't dead. He was breathing. Perhaps he was drunk.

"You go back to the car, Erica," Peglum told the girl. "This is no place for you. Anything can happen here. This is nothing less than a hobo jungle. God knows what we're up against."

"I'll stay," said Erica quietly. "I'm in this."

There was no discussion. You can't argue with a girl like that.

"Aw, let the poor devil alone!" somebody called. "Let a man sleep it off if he gets drunk. What's it to ye?"

There were more similar remarks. Peglum ignored them, and shook the prone form of old Darkle.

"Hey, get up, you. Hey, Darkle, get up and have a drink."

Magic words. The body stirred. The washed-out eyes opened halfway.

"Whacha want? Le'me alone. W'at say 'bout a drink, hey?"

"Get up. I'll buy you a drink. You come along with me—"

"Naw. I aint movin'."

MURDER COMES TO BUTTONVILLE

I

Frozen stubbornness. . . . Erica drew Peglum aside, whispered:

"Did you look at what's under that awful bed?"

He shook his head. Then he leaned down and peered. Scarcely had he done so before the prone figure of Darkle came violently to life.

"Hey, you—" And screaming words unprintable, he flung himself upon Peglum's neck, pounding, gouging, clawing, calling out for help. "Hey, hey, hey—they're tryin' to frame me!"

And the door burst in with a flood of menacing evil-faced men and women.

Peglum fought. Erica screamed, backed across the room, staring at the advancing, shouting, clamoring mob. Peglum had the Old Man of the Sea clinging to his neck and shoulders. Peglum plunged into the wall, dashing Darkle against it, breaking his frantic hold, finally shaking him to the floor screaming insanely. Then the mob charged. A score of fists seemed to drive at Peglum together. He was down. . . . He was up again, swinging and fighting and flailing. Down again. Feet were trampling him. Hands were tearing at his hair. He heard Erica scream in mortal terror. He got to his knees. Then a heavy shoe smashed against the point of his jaw. . . .

He looked up into the face of Sergeant Case.

"Sure, ye're a sucker fer trouble, Hartness. Now what in hell would ye be doin' here, and the girl with ye, too?"

What was it? There had been a reason. Peglum tried to remember. Erica had brought him. About a pistol, that was it. Something else. Something under the bed— What was it?

"Look there," he managed to say, pointing weakly. "Look under the bed."

Case bent over and looked. It had rolled farther back now, but it was still there—a little gray-white ivory nut with a red circle clearly visible.

"That's it," said Peglum. "That does it. It all ties in now. Take Darkle along—he's your murderer. How did you ever think of coming here?"

"Sure, when ye break all the laws of speed and traffic and nearly kill a handful of citizens, d'ye think we wouldn't notice ye? Whoop—there ye go again."

For Peglum had sunk back and closed his eyes.

THIS story may be most simply brought to its conclusion by reprinting five telegrams—thus:

BARNES ABC NY BUTTONVILLE TOWN DRUNK-
ARD DARKLE FATHER OF SLAIN PRINTERS
DEVIL CONFESSED AFTER GRILLING TO
DOUBLE SLAYING OF BOY AND WINKOE STOP
BOY HAD DISCOVERED CACHE OF COCAINE
IN IVORY NUTS STOP HAD BROUGHT ONE
HOME STOP FATHER HAD TAKEN LARGE
QUANTITY UNRESPONSIBLE FOR ACTIONS
BRUTAL STOP BOY COMPLAINED WINKOE
WHO VISITED DARKLE UPERAIDED HIM STOP
DARKLE AGAIN UNDER INFLUENCE STALKS
WINKOE SHOOT'S HIM WITH PISTOL AC-
QUIRED THROUGH GRESHOPS CHARITY STOP
SON WITNESSES MURDER HIDES PISTOL IN
HARTNESS BAG BUT IS KILLED BY FATHER
IN HIS INSANE DELIRIUM STOP PERSONAL
MESSAGE THERES YOUR STORY MUG DO I
GET THE ABC SERVICE. HARTNESS

II

HARTNESS VIGILANTE BUTTONVILLE N.Y.
SURE YOU GET SERVICE ALSO CHIEF SENDS
BONUS OF FIVE HUNDRED STOP GET ME
EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW ERICA GRESHOP
NOBODY ELSE CAN GET ONE BARNES ABC NY.

III

BARNES ABC N.Y. ERICA GRESHOP IN EX-
CLUSIVE INTERVIEW INFORMED REPORTER
TODAY OF HER INTENTION TO ABANDON HER
ENTIRE FORTUNE WHICH WAS THE GIFT
OF HER FOSTER FATHER THE LATE J LOUIS
GRESHOP SLAIN IN DOPE RING WARFARE
TURNING ALL HOLDINGS TO CHARITY STOP
MISS GRESHOP ALSO ADMITS HER INTEN-
TION OF COMBINING THE LOCAL NEWSPA-
PER QUOTE PROGRESS UNQUOTE FOUNDED
BY GRESHOP AND NOW HER PROPERTY WITH
THE QUOTE VIGILANTE UNQUOTE RECENTLY
PURCHASED BY HARTNESS

IV (A year later)

HARTNESS VIGILANTE BUTTONVILLE N.Y.
CONFIRM OR DENY RUMOR OF PROSPECTIVE
MARRIAGE OF ERICA GRESHOP WITH THAT
CHISELING NEWSPAPER OWNER HARTNESS
STOP BETTING HERE IS FOUR TO ONE

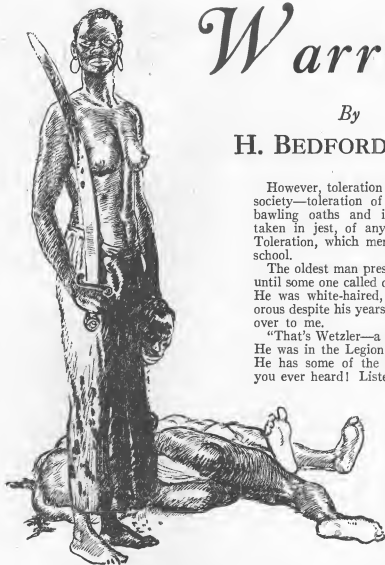
V

BARNES ABC NY ERICA GRESHOP QUESTIONED
AS TO HER PROSPECTIVE MARRIAGE WITH
PROMINENT NEWSPAPER OWNER PEGLUM
HARTNESS EMPLOYED CLASSICAL TIME
WORN PHRASE QUOTE THIS IS SO SUDDEN
UNQUOTE STOP HARTNESS INTERVIEWED
USED EQUALLY CLASSICAL QUOTE NONE OF
YOUR BUSINESS UNQUOTE

Warriors

By

H. BEDFORD-JONES



Illustrated by
Jeremy Cannon

I WALKED into a blare of voices, a blue cloud of tobacco fumes, a redolent odor of the proper authority, and found myself in a gathering of "Anciens" of the Foreign Legion. Corrigan, whom I knew rather well, introduced me to the gang, as one who might be termed a friend if not a brother, and the talk went on. It was raucous and impolite.

"Gimme a *cibiche*—you smoked the last of mine, blast you!"

"I suppose you'll be sprawling under the table when Sidi Mahomet comes up?"

"Here's some Pernod; who'll have a *caoudji* with me? Allah! Don't take it all, you imbecile—"

Wetzler stood up, liquor banishing the pallor of his faded, lined cheeks, and raised his glass.

"Clink your glasses, comrades—to the Legion that destroyed the Amazons and dethroned a king, regardless of its own agony!"

If those final words, as I thought, held personal significance, it was lost in a roar of acclaim as the toast was drunk.

"What campaign was that?" some one demanded. "You mean real live Amazons—women fighting?"

"I do," said Wetzler dryly. "And could they fight! They were the body-guard of Behanzin, king of Dahomey. They were armed with huge sabers, and when they chopped at a head, it went off *ker-flop*. They got in their daily exercise that way."

in Exile

This grim drama of the Foreign Legion's little-known campaign in Dahomey, "The King's Pipe," is the fourteenth story in an already famous series.

Somebody down the table grunted. "Oh, you mean that old Dahomey Campaign back in '92! A parade through the jungle for the Legion, a few casualties, and another slice of Africa under the Tricolor!"

Wetzler's eyes flashed. "It was no parade, my friend. A few casualties? Only a few hundred, true; but ten down with fever or dysentery for every one touched by a bullet. Tremendous losses, a march of sixty days on Abomey, the capital; every day of that march continual fighting, often hand-to-hand. And no jungle, either, but river marshes and tropical brush. And in those days, the Legion had adventurers in its ranks, men who played chess with kings for pawns, men who juggled life and death in either hand, and who laughed when they lost and paid!"

A ripple of applause greeted his peroration. He had something, that old fellow, and every one of us felt the power of him. My friend Corrigan spoke up.

"Wetzler, if there's a story back of all that, let's have it. We know the Legion of the war, of Syria, of Morocco; we're fed up with all that. Dahomey—that's a new one on me. What's the story, or is there one?"

More applause. As Wetzler looked around, decision came into his face.

"Yes!" he said almost defiantly. "A story to eat your hearts out—not my story, but that of Bauer. He was in my company; I knew him well. I know what happened to him. He had his head cut off—and yet he served with the Legion for another eight months and was discharged on our return to Algeria."

"What kind of a joke is that?" demanded a voice. "Are you serious? Or drunk?"

"I repeat," said Wetzler deliberately, "Bauer had his head cut off, yet was with the Legion in the rest of the campaign and may be alive yet for all I know."



"Oh! You mean magic, African magic, eh?" put in Corrigan.

Wetzler flashed him a look.

"I do not mean magic. I mean precisely what I say. The story's never been told, never been known, though snatches of it are in the records; it can do no harm to tell it now, if you want to hear it."

Everybody yelled assent, for those words of his had us all guessing. He stated a rank impossibility and had thrown out the only possible answer, that of magic or wizardry. And, while the wine of wizardry has always held allure for men, the necromance of the utterly impossible has always appealed peculiarly to the Legion. Yes, he had his audience, no doubt about that!

HE went on to tell about Bauer, one of those contradictory persons who appear destined for a hangman's noose,



Bauer was led to where the king waited, with his fearsome bodyguard of black Amazons. Men were kneeling before him—the leaders who had been defeated.

yet whose evil natures are lit by flashes of nobility. Bauer had a terrifically bad record, in a day when the Legion was noted for such records. It was no secret that his name was assumed; but as he himself had morosely observed, his whole family was devil-marked.

Bauer was a big, strapping fellow with a wide brow, intelligent eyes, powerful features. Beards were then popular, in and out of the Legion. Bauer wore his curly brown beard cut square, just below his chin, and he was hairy to the eyes.

He was given to strange moods of depression or uplift. He could be a joyous singing giant or an unutterable brute; usually the latter. Liquor mad-

dened him, and in a drunken rage he was simply a destroying fury. Nobody loved him except the woman he had married shortly before the marching battalion left Algeria—she was the daughter of a quartermaster at Oran and should have known better. The day they embarked, she showed up with a black eye and bruised lips to wave farewell.

Bauer did not like the prospect of central Africa, and he hated everyone around him; he spent half the voyage in cells, becoming more and more embittered against Lieutenant Friant. Surprisingly enough, he knew a good deal about Dahomey, though he refused point-blank to say how he knew. So extensive was his knowledge that the higher com-



mand took cognizance of it and he was frequently detailed to give information regarding maps and routes and customs. But one day, when he was in expansive mood, the colonel put the question to him and he explained:

"One of my family is there, or was. He has written home volumes about the place; the letters have interested me."

The general hope in the company was that Bauer would remain permanently in Dahomey. He had another year of his enlistment to serve, which meant that he had made life hell to those around him for six years, and they were tired of it.

The Legion battalion formed part of the Dodds column, formed to march

up-country and definitely to extinguish King Behanzin and his bloody capital of Abomey, just beyond his sacred town of Kana. Behanzin had all but pushed the French colony into the sea, was actually on the outskirts of Porto Novo, and the march would assuredly be a continual fight, at least until the holy town of Kana was taken.

Nor was it any march against black savages. Behanzin had an army of close to ten thousand warriors, trained by Europeans and armed with repeating rifles. Germans were all through this country, and according to barracks gossip German traders had given the king not only arms in plenty, but even a few Krupp guns. What Dodds could do with

his little column was problematical. After leaving requisite garrisons, he had only the Legion, a few marines, and native troops—Senegalese and Haussas, some two thousand all told.

THREE days before the march began, Bauer was summoned to headquarters to give information on routes. As there were no roads and the natives could not be trusted, his knowledge was valuable. He came back to barracks, after consuming a few drinks of palm-wine on the way, and came face to face with Lieutenant Friant, who perceived his condition and curtly ordered him to the guard-house.

Bauer, whom the heady palm-wine had turned into a perfect fiend, furiously tore open his cartridge-pouch, whipped a rifle from the rack, and fired point-blank at the lieutenant. The bullet missed Friant's cheek by an inch and slapped into the mud wall. Half a dozen of the Legion piled on to Bauer before he could fire again. They got him down, but he was foaming at the mouth, raving mad, and not until he was tied up could he be dragged off to the cells.

When he finally sobered up, he could remember nothing that had happened. His fate was perfectly clear, and he accepted it with sullen oaths; court-martial and execution. . . .

The lieutenant, that evening, took his men aside and spoke with them, one by one—all who had witnessed the scene. Next morning came the court-martial. Bauer was brought in, surly, begrimed, with the look of a trapped animal. He mumbled a few inarticulate words and fell silent. For him, all was hopeless. Lieutenant Friant took the stand and spoke simply, clearly, quietly.

"The fault is really mine, for having issued loaded cartridges by mistake. They should have been blanks. In fact, Private Bauer must have supposed them blanks, as these were issued to all the men."

Surprise here, questioning of the other men; they all replied alike. Not, of course, that the officers trying the case were fooled by this talk of blank cartridges. They even eyed Friant and his Legionnaires with a certain cynical admiration, as though wishing him joy of his bargain.

And they were right. Bauer got off with a light sentence of cells and degradation; but far from expressing any gratitude, he cursed the lieutenant bitterly,



with brutal and furious oaths, as soon as he could speak freely. And this won no love for him among his comrades.

The march began, and almost came to a sudden end at Dogba, when four thousand of Behanzin's picked troops struck the camp like a whirlwind at five in the morning. It was a complete surprise. The Amazons, strapping black women with huge sabers, led the attack. The camp was penetrated. For a moment all was lost. Commandant Faurax gathered the Legion, and fell dead. Raging, the Legion went into the blacks with the cold steel, met the Amazons hand to hand, cleared the camp of the enemy, and then attacked the four thousand. The black troops were shattered and disappeared in the brush.

Bauer fought like ten, that morning; and in the days of constant brush fighting that followed, bore himself well.

The advance was stubbornly contested. The enemy cut off the lines of communication and the supply service was disrupted. The marsh-lands along the river were horrible, the higher brush beyond was sun-smitten. Sickness began to make heavy inroads. The convoys bringing up water were attacked



daily. Colonel Dodds reluctantly decided to return to Akpa, reorganize the column, evacuate the sick and wounded, firmly establish the service of supply, and then finish the job. Kana and the capital, Abomey, were not far now.

Behanzin, at this recoil of the column, imagined it in defeat, and his black troops harassed the line of march night and day. The Senegalese suffered most. As usual, they had their wives and families along; not to fight, but to prepare their food, help in carrying their loads, take care of them if ill or wounded, and so forth. These people suffered. So did the coolies who formed the transport. So did the Legion, for that matter, since food had run out. The horses disappeared. The splendid mules brought from Algeria, worth upward of a thousand francs there, did not survive long here; those not killed by the climate went into the pots of the Legion.

It was a terrific march under the sun of the equator. With Akpa almost at hand, the crisis came when, for lack of porters, the Senegalese tried to carry the litters of the sick and wounded. They crumpled up. The column was halted, with a spatter of rifle-fire along front

and rear where the blacks were attacking. It was Bauer who, with a rolling volley of oaths, broke ranks and waved an arm at his comrades.

"Come along, come along!" he bawled furiously. "Let the Senegalese fight for a bit. The Legion's good for other things."

The others got his idea, advanced on the litters, and the astonished officers beheld the Legion doing coolie work for the sick and wounded, all the rest of the way into Akpa.

Oddly enough, in all this marching and fighting, as the food failed and sickness hit, Bauer kept up to the mark. It was observed that he always had lemons on hand, would trade anything for lemons. He had kept his knowledge to himself, which made the other men furious, but lemons not only kept one in health here, they also gave a grateful breath to the sick and wounded. The very odor was enough to make a feverish man smile gratefully.

So, if Bauer was blessed for one deed, he was cursed for another; and he gave back curse for curse like a snarling beast. No one was sorry when he disappeared.

It came just before they reached Akpa. A furious tornado hit the column; black clouds, terrific wind that kicked up a dust-storm until they struggled blindly; finally rain in sweeping torrents. And all the time the "*pick-pock!*" of rifles along the skirmish lines where the native troops fought off the harassing blacks. Private Bauer was pricked off on the list of missing.

FIGHTING gusty rain and wind that bent trees and almost carried a man from his feet, Bauer stumbled into a gully, was knocked senseless, and revived to find himself being hauled out by grinning black soldiers. He fought, and was rewarded by a long slave-yoke of wood fastened about his neck, nearly bending him double with its weight, whips stinging his legs to urge him on.

In this fashion, he finished the march; not to Akpa, but to Abomey—a city of mud walls where heads grinned on spikes, of thatched huts and huddled mud houses, of the mud and timber palace of King Behanzin, fronting on a great market-square.

When they took off the yoke, Bauer flew at the blacks around him, hoping to make them kill before they tortured. He fought with the insensate ferocity of

a beast, caught a spear from the nearest man, killed three of them before a club knocked him over. Then he was bound, and with blood besmearing his face and beard, was led through the huge square to where the king waited, among his five hundred wives and his fearsome body-guard of black Amazons.

A heavy black man wrapped in an old green silk dressing-gown, features wooden, cruel, impassive. A number of men were kneeling before him, an Amazon beside each one; these were leaders of his regiments whom the column had defeated. Behanzin lifted his hand. The sabers of the Amazons whirled, and the heads of the kneeling men dropped to the earth. The ground was blood-stained for yards around, from other executions.

BAUER was marched forward. Wiping the blood from his eyes, he saw the white-clad figure of a European among the group behind the king—a massive, heavily bearded man. This man spoke rapidly with the king, who gave a curt order. Instead of being handed over to the Amazon killers, Bauer found himself led away to a hut. Except for a chain that bound his ankle to the center-post of the hut, he was left free. Bowls of food were brought in. An Amazon stood guard at the door, and he was left in peace. Like the animal he was, he ate, washed the blood from his face, and fell asleep.

When he wakened, it was sunset, and a man sat smoking and watching him.

It was the European he had seen behind the king.

Bauer sat up and blinked. The man was smoking a long native pipe whose bowl and stem were heavily and beautifully ornamented with worked silver. It caught the eye instantly.

"Ah!" exclaimed Bauer. "That's a pipe, a real one!"

"King Behanzin's pipe," said the visitor in German. "He gave it to me, as a mark of his favor. So you don't know me, Herman?"

Bauer's mouth fell open. His blue eyes widened. A low cry burst from him.

"You! No, no—not you, Hans! It cannot be—you're dead—"

The other smiled, leaned over to him, embraced him swiftly.

"So, brother Herman, I find you in the French army, the Legion! Yes, the last I heard from home, you had enlisted."

Bauer drew away. That touch of affection was more surprise than anything else; a remnant of boyhood, perhaps, when affection had existed.

"Ach!" he grunted, meeting the cold blue eyes, cold as his own. "And you, Hans! How is it that you're not dead? After your last letters came, there was word of your death."

"Politeness," Hans was of the same general build and air as his brother, had much the same voice. Without the beard, perhaps the two men would not have looked so much alike. The beard of Hans was a little more grizzled than the square-cut beard of Herman Bauer, but it was full, sweeping over his chest.



"So you don't know me?" Bauer's mouth fell open; a cry burst from him: "No, not you, Hans! It cannot be—you're dead—"

"Politeness to the family," he went on cynically. "I had an argument with my superior regarding a serious shortage in the funds of the trading-company. It came to blows. He got the worst of it, naturally, and I decamped. I was with an English company on the Niger for a year, then came over on my own to Dahomey. I did well. Officially, of course, I'm dead. Here I'm Hans Schmidt, trader, assistant to the king, counselor, what you like! I've handled a lot of deals for him, such as bringing in guns and powder and cartridges. If I ever get out of this country, I'll be well off. That's in some doubt, thanks to your damned French. How I'll get out, without my identity being learned, is a problem. And now you have to turn up to complicate matters!"

"Complicate matters?" repeated Bauer.

"Yes. The king wants your head to put over the gate. I got him to postpone taking it until tomorrow, so I could get information out of you in regard to the French column. But tomorrow—" And he shrugged as he resumed smoking.

Bauer stared, and gulped hard.

"Eh? But if you're in favor with him, you can have me held as a prisoner, exchanged, anything!"

"Nothing," said the other, with a terrible finality. "No prisoners in this war, my honest brother. Behanzin wants a white head above his gate, and means to have it. With it, he'll win the war—so the fetich priestesses have told him. He's already convinced that the column has retired, beaten."

"Bah! Merely to reorganize, get rid of the sick and wounded, and make a dash for Kana and this accursed place."

Hans nodded. "So I thought, myself. And I must get away before your French reach here; they'd hardly treat me with consideration. Luckily, I speak French perfectly, also English, and my money's safe out of the country—"

"My God!" said Bauer. "And that's all you think about, when I'm to die tomorrow?"

"Be sensible," the other said coolly. "You've been dead, to me, for a long time. We needn't prate about brotherly love. I'd help you if I can, but it's out of the question. Even if I got you away from this town, you'd never get ten miles without being run down. I hope your comrades in the Legion have more affection for you than the folks at home. Or are you still a mad dog?"

Bauer snarled in response, and Hans laughed a little.

"The same, eh?" he resumed lightly. "You've never redeemed yourself and the family name, and you never will. I would if I could; but you'd not. That's the difference between us, my brother."

"YAH!" jeered Bauer. "And you couldn't even if you would! You're officially dead at this minute!"

Hans chuckled amusedly. "Right; a good joke, too! However, I could clear out of here, go to Canada or America, and become a new man—simply because no one would ever be looking for me. I'd have money. I could go into business—"

"Why don't some of these blacks kill you?" snapped Bauer. "How can it be safe for you here, especially if Behanzin gets defeated by the whites?"

Hans held up the beautiful silver pipe. "This—you see? The king's pipe is known everywhere; it's a sort of safe-



guard. No one would dare touch me, if I showed it."

"Then, why couldn't you let me take it and slip out of the damned place?"

Hans shook his head thoughtfully. "That has occurred to me; quite useless. Your escape would be discovered. Your charming guard is changed every three hours, and in three hours you'd not get far. In fact, if I save you from torture, I'll be doing all in my power."

HE was quite calm about it, quite definite. Beneath his impassive mien, however, was an equally definite stirring of anxiety, even emotion. Bauer divined this, and suddenly comprehended. If any earthly thing could be done to save him, his brother would do it; there simply was nothing. Next moment, this was proven.

"A message to Akpa?" he suggested. "If the French knew any white prisoners had been taken, they might—"

Hans shook his massive beard. "I sent off word this morning," he said quietly. "My messenger was turned back."

Bauer drew a deep breath and nodded.

"I see. Well, brother, I thank you; I understand. . . . Shall I see you again?"

Hans nodded.

"In the morning, yes. It won't be until noon; we'll have until then. Meantime, I'll try everything in my power. I've tried everything except threats—it isn't healthy to try threats with Behanzin. But I'll try them. Are more troops coming up to join your force, do you know?"

"A detachment of marines, yes."

"Good. Perhaps I can make the fool see reason. You know," he added gravely, "this king is what we, at home, would call a monster. He thrives on blood. *Auf wiedersehen!*"

Bauer found himself alone again. His eyes followed the square-shouldered figure, with the silver pipe in its hand.

Noon tomorrow, then. And now the evening was at hand. He remembered how the Amazons had lopped off those heads, each at one swift, sure stroke. He fumbled in his pocket for tobacco, and rolled a cigarette. His few belongings remained intact, for he had nothing that attracted black cupidity. He smoked thoughtfully, calmly. After all, no man could have a quicker, cleaner death—if only there were no torture!

When Hans, the following morning, came stooping into the hut and straightened up, the attitude of the two men was

just the opposite of what it had been the previous day. Now it was the khaki-clad Bauer who was impassive, phlegmatic, absolutely cool; now it was the white-clad Hans who was nervous, agitated, his eyes bloodshot, his fingers unsteady as they clasped the silver pipe. At sight of the pipe, the Amazon on guard had admitted him at once.

"I've just been with Behanzin," he burst out. "There was a scene—a hell of a scene! He damned near had his women slice me on the spot! I used threats. I told him the French were being reinforced. The fat fool's been drinking. He's just killed twenty native prisoners, a couple of your Senegalese in the group. He's sending for you in ten minutes. *Ach, Gott!* It's frightful. I'm helpless—"

"Forget it, brother," Bauer said quietly, and smiled. "There's something you can do for me, if you will; change clothes with me. Then put on your white coat again, so you won't be in French uniform."

Hans stared at him. "Eh? Why?"

"I should like to die in clean garments, brother. It's a fancy of mine."

Hans obeyed, with tears glittering on his beard. He donned the army boots, the torn khaki trousers and shirt. His hand struck something in the shirt pocket.

"What's this?"

"My papers. Keep them." Bauer lit his last cigarette. "Now do something else for me."

"Anything. My God, if there's anything—"

"You'll do it? Give me your word of honor, brother."

"Of course!" said Hans in a shaken voice. "What, then?"

BAUER smiled. "Calm yourself. You want to get out of this country; well, I'm showing you the way. Cut your beard square, like mine—you see? You have the clothes, the papers. You have the silver pipe which will get you safe away from here. Go back and join the Legion in my name—say that the blacks captured you, but you got away—"

"Herman! You're insane!"

"Quite the contrary. Half the Legion speaks French with an accent or speaks it very poorly. You've been a soldier. No one would question you for a moment. I've got a bad record; well, turn it into a good record, Hans! You couldn't manage it under different cir-

cumstances, perhaps, but here, on campaign, it'll go off like clockwork. Shave your beard entirely, if you like, later on. I've always worn a beard in the Legion—"

A tramp of feet. A dozen of the Amazons were marching up. He rose, calmly, and put out his hand.

"They're here. Good-by, brother! Oh, I forgot to tell you—so many things—"

They gave him no time to tell anything. The two men, embracing, were roughly jerked apart. Hans fell with his face in his hands, sobbing. Bauer marched out proudly and calmly, and everything was drowned in the yelling voices of the thousands of black folk thronged in the great square before the palace.

Next time Hans saw the face of his brother, it was on a spike above the palace gate. It speaks well for him, perhaps, that he risked a great deal to get that head down, and took it with him when he went by night, and buried it.

SOME days later, Bauer came staggering into camp. The column was advancing from Akpa; he was picked up muttering in fever, and his appearance was regarded as miraculous. His story was disjointed, incoherent, but he had suffered much. And he had learned a great deal about the army of King Behanzin, about the fortifications at Kana, about everything the superior command most needed to know.

True, he had forgotten a great deal about things closer to hand. When he met Lieutenant Friant, the young officer halted and held out his hand.

"I'm glad you got back, Bauer," he said frankly, curiously. "Congratulations!"

"Thank you, Lieutenant," said Bauer awkwardly, but with a friendly glow in his blue eyes. "Thank you! It is like coming back from the dead."

The officer looked after him curiously. Assuredly, the fellow had changed!

Others found it so, too. In little ways, on the march, he just didn't know his way around; he was awkward, fumbling, uncertain. He seemed to have forgotten many things. All this was natural, with the touch of fever that was on him. The remarkable point was the difference in the man himself. All the old snarling animal had disappeared. Bauer was a man now, human. Doubtfully, hesitantly, some of his comrades began to like him a little. . . .

They plunged directly into brush fighting. The column hammered straight on for Kana, the holy city of Dahomey. This was defended with desperate courage; the battle lasted three whole days, but the French were fully informed of the intrenchments, the disposition of Behanzin's army, and the terrain ahead. The hand-to-hand fighting was severe. The Amazons died with ferocity, but they died.

Bauer got his ticket home—a bullet tearing through his chest, that landed him in a litter. As the wounded waited for the convoy to start back with them, Lieutenant Friant came staggering along, escorted by two men. An access of fever shook him. He was pale and flushed by turns, and halted, unable to go another step, while his men went to search for a litter.

"Ha, my lieutenant!" said Bauer. "Here's something that'll do you good."

Painfully, he twisted about, got a hand to the musette under his head, and drew out a lemon. The officer seized it with a gasp of gratitude, then checked himself.

"No, no! You need it more than I do, Bauer."

"Bah!" Private Bauer laughed a little, his white teeth flashing through that square, bushy beard of his. "I detest lemons, my lieutenant!"

And Friant bit into the yellow fruit with a sigh, as he sank down on the litter provided for him. He died three days later. . . .

Bauer? Oh, he was tough! He got sent back to the base, and on to Porto Novo, and his wound healed in time. He had not even lost his pipe—a long pipe of beautifully worked silver about the wooden bowl and stem. One of the officers, recognizing it as native work, offered him a large sum for it, but Bauer only laughed.

"Pardon, but I can never part with this pipe! It is more than money to me. Where would I get another like it?"

"Where, indeed!" sighed the officer regretfully. "However, Bauer, when you get back to Algeria and your wife has a woman's say about that pipe—my offer stands good!"

This was Bauer's first intimation that a wife awaited him in Algeria.

AND there, to the general surprise of everyone, Wetzler ended his story abruptly. Voices poured at him to continue, demanding to know one thing and

another. He held up his hand, with a shrug.

"Comrades! You say the Dahomey campaign was a parade, eh? Well, let me tell you something. We came back to Oran, and before we had reached the Zouave barracks where the Dames de France had arranged a feast for us, we began to go to hospital. It's the truth! Not one of us was the same man. For weeks afterward, the men of the Legion were taken off to hospital—"

Corrigan lifted a lusty voice.

"Devil take your hospitals! What we want to know is what became of Bauer? And the wife of his brother?"

Wetzler shook his head. "I don't know. At the end of his enlistment he left the service. I imagine he married the wife who was waiting for him—surely, a woman would know the truth! Well, that's all."

It was disappointing. We had expected some grand climax, and there was none to the story. . . .

When the party broke up, Corrigan drove home with me.

"If you're so damned interested in what happened to Bauer," he said to me, "why don't you ask Wetzler yourself? There's no doubt the old rascal knows, but he simply won't tell. He has a tailor-shop out on the west side of town somewhere—look it up in the telephone-book. Herman H. Wetzler is the name."

Well, I looked it up, found the address, and drove out there. I was curious enough to put the question to him.

I had to park at some little distance from his tailor shop, which was a small but comfortable-looking establishment. So I left the car and walked along to the shop, and paused to look in the window.

What a lucky pause that was! Inside, showing samples to a client, I saw Wetzler's spare, trim figure. A gray-haired woman came from the back room with some question. He turned to her, smiled, kissed her cheek affectionately, and came back to his client. And as he did so, I saw that he held a pipe in his hand—a long-stemmed pipe, of queer design, stem and bowl covered over with silverwork of curious form.

As I looked at it, the truth flashed upon me. This was the pipe of King Behanzin, of course!

So I went away without asking any question. I knew the answer already.

Another vivid story in this remarkable series will be a feature of our next issue.



SEA

*A famous sailor and writer—
man tells the story of a strange
wager and a hot-fought race
around Cape Horn.*

I WAS twenty-three on the day that I passed the exam for my second mate's license. The exam was over by noon, and I went straight to the docks to look for a ship. Second mates' berths were scarce, with a score of applicants for every vacancy.

I'd been aboard a half-dozen ships when I came to the *South Star*. Crossing her gangway, I met a fellow with one of his arms in a sling. "After her second mate's berth?" he asked; and at my reply said: "I'm glad I busted my fin. You'll be wishing you'd broken your neck before you're done with the ship."

"What's wrong with her?" I inquired.

"The ship's right enough. It's the confounded skipper," he replied.

"What's the matter with him?" I asked.

"All he thinks of is how fast he can drive her," he answered.

"Suits me. I like a driving skipper."

"Me too, but there's a limit," he grumbled. "This voyage he'll sail her clear under, and she won't come up. Take my tip and back out before you get in." And then with a glance at the *South Star's* poop, he added: "There's the crazy fool now! You'd think he was old enough to have some sense."



VIXEN

By BILL ADAMS

Illustrated by Frederic Anderson

"He's not more than three or four years older than me," I replied, and started out to go aboard.

Laying a restraining hand on my arm, he asked: "Haven't you heard about the *Polaris*?"

"What about her?" I asked.

"The two ships go out on the tide tomorrow morning. The *Polaris*' skipper is another driving fool. He's sixty if he's a day. No fool like an old fool. They've got a bet on the race. I don't know what it is, but I'm glad I'm out of it. Take my tip and go hunt a berth elsewhere."

"No skipper can drive too hard to suit me," I retorted, and passed on.

A burst of cheering came from a little way up the dock. It was from the *Polaris*, going out to drop anchor in the river and wait for next morning's tide.

(I should note that this was not the modern *Polaris*,—a fine ship which some of you may have seen,—but another able ship of the same name, now gone to her reward.)

"You're after the second mate's berth, eh?" asked the skipper of the *South Star*, looking me up and down when I stepped to his poop. "You'd better think twice. It's going to be no soft voyage."

"I've done my thinking, sir."

"Good! That's the spirit!" he exclaimed, and led me to his chart-room and signed me on.

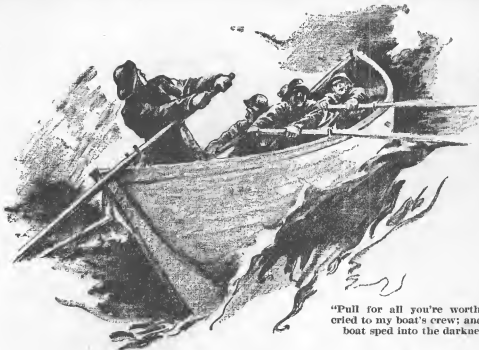
"May I ask what the bet is, sir?" I asked. "I hear you've a bet with the *Polaris*' skipper."

"If I win, the world's mine," he replied. "If I lose—well, I'm not going to lose."

Since it was plain that he didn't want to tell me what the bet was, I went about my business. The mate and third mate were hustling the crew, getting all ready for sea. In a couple of hours we went out and dropped anchor in the river. Usually a crew gets a good rest the last night in port; but that night the crews of both ships were kept on deck, going carefully over all the gear.

AT dawn the ships went to sea, each with a tug-boat ahead. About a mile offshore they cast off their tugs and started to set sail. There was a fresh wind and choppy sea. The sky spoke of more wind to come.

Both ships had their topsails set when the *Polaris* hoisted a signal, calling her tug back. Seeing her stop, our skipper stopped the *South Star*, that we might



"Pull for all you're worth!" I cried to my boat's crew; and the boat sped into the darkness.

gain no unfair advantage through our rival having a bad start. They had found a stowaway and were sending him ashore in the tug. But before her tug could get alongside, the *Polaris* squared her sails and stood on. Her skipper had changed his mind and was taking the stowaway to sea. One of our crew said, "Stowaways is lucky sometimes. Sometimes a stowaway'll bring a ship luck."

A squall whipped over the sea. A torrent of rain beat down. The land faded astern. Lying over, side by side, a little way apart, the ships were soon running like stags. So it was till dusk. Then we lost the *Polaris'* lights in the murk. Ignoring the rule of the road that orders all ships to go cautiously in thick weather, our skipper kept every inch of sail set; the ship tearing through the smother with her decks awash, every rope near the breaking strain.

Morning came with the wind harder than ever, the rain heavier; the sea invisible half a mile away. . . . So it was for three days and nights, the ship staggering under her press of sail with her decks flooded from end to end. On the fourth morning the wind came yet harder, but the clouds broke, and a few patches of sky showed. Far away, her hull hidden, only her upper sails visible, was the *Polaris*, still running neck and neck with us.

Since we'd left port I'd slept only in snatches. So had the mate and third mate. The skipper hadn't once left the deck. If he'd slept, he'd done it on his feet. The steward had taken his meals

to the poop. Now and then we'd let part of the crew go below for a few hours, but day and night had kept some of the best men at the halyards, ready to lower sail in a rush if the skipper gave orders to do so.

"There's more wind coming," the mate said to me, his eyes on the scurrying clouds.

"Let it come, sir!" said I.

"I miss my guess if one of the ships doesn't get dismasted," continued the mate, and with a shrug added: "Well, that'll settle the race. If either gets dismasted or wrecked, the other will win automatically. That's agreed."

"Fair enough, sir," said I. "Let the better ship win!"

Nightfall proved the mate right about the wind. As it suddenly freshened, he called the men from the halyards and ordered them to stand by the sheets. With the wind wild as it now was, no sail would lower if the halyards were let go—the force of the wind would hold the spar up. "Keep your knives handy! If the order comes to take in sail, cut the sheets in a hurry!" ordered the mate.

All night men stood by the sheets. Now and then one or other of the mates lay down on the deck for a cat-nap; but all night the skipper stood by the helmsman. What did he mean, I wondered, by, "If I win, the world's mine."

At dawn the wind eased and came from astern. The ship rode erect, with dry decks, a warm sun on her. And still we saw the *Polaris*, her upper sails just visible, running neck and neck with

us. . . . For ten days we sailed in a steady trade wind, and morning by morning saw her where she had been when night fell. We mates went to our cabins to sleep now, when off duty. But the skipper took only cat-naps in the chart-room, and had his meals taken there. One evening I ventured to ask him: "What happens if the race ends in a draw, sir?"

"A draw's no good. I've got to win," he tersely replied.

WE'D been five weeks at sea before we lost sight of our rival. A morning came when she was no longer seen. That day the skipper was like a caged panther, pacing the poop hour after hour, forever searching the horizon with his telescope. Toward evening we met a ship sailing in the opposite direction, just within signaling distance. Replying to our question, she told us that she could see the sails of our rival above the horizon on her other side.

Four days later we met another ship that told us the same. Soon after that ship was gone, a hard wind rose, and for three days and nights the ship ran again, like a hunted stag, her decks awash with waist-deep water. On the fourth day a steamer passed us and signaled that she'd seen our rival fifty miles astern. Then at last the skipper ordered some sail off the staggering ship. It was just in time; for while we were taking in the light sails, a savage squall came from dead ahead. To save the masts from going overboard, we were forced to take in all sail but the upper topsails. We were entering the "roaring forties," and they were true to their name.

That night, unable to go her course, the ship labored in terrific seas. All night, all next day, a wind of almost hurricane force drove her farther and farther to leeward. I was on duty when, in the middle of the next night, the wind eased and the weather cleared. Ahead, and a little to one side of the ship, was a bright light that I knew at once was no ship's light. As I called the skipper from the chart-room, the clouds parted. Faint in the dim moonlight, we made out the loom of an island. "I didn't know there was a lighthouse hereabouts, sir," said I.

"There isn't!" he replied, and added: "Some vessel's been wrecked. Her people have seen our lights, and are signaling for help. They'll have to wait till some other ship comes along. I can't stop. It may go hard on them, but they won't

starve. There are plenty of birds, and eggs, and shellfish. And there's water."

For a few minutes we stood on, watching the bonfire high on the island. Then suddenly the skipper cried, "Call all hands on deck! Steer for the island. I've a notion that it's the *Polaris* that's wrecked. We must find out. If it's the *Polaris*, the race is won!"

"But suppose that it's not, sir? She was only fifty miles astern before the gale started. She'll be catching us up while we delay," I suggested.

"It won't take long to find out," he replied. "In an hour or so we can get the castaways aboard and be on our way again."

Coming on deck, the mate said to me: "No night to put a boat out! This is only a lull. Before long the wind'll come hard as ever."

With the *South Star* stopped maybe an eighth of a mile offshore, the skipper turned to me and asked: "Are you willing to take a boat ashore?" And as he spoke, a moan came over the dark sea, a spatter of rain fell.

"Yes sir," I replied.

"Take four of the best men, and look alive!" ordered the skipper.

"Pull for all you're worth!" I cried to my boat's crew; and as they lay back on their oars and the boat sped into the darkness, the moan of the wind grew louder, the rain thicker.

THE squall passed. The rain ceased. I looked for the bonfire in vain. "The rain drowned their fire out, sir!" called one of my men. And as he spoke, the young moon shone through a cloud rift.

"Backwater, all!" I ordered. For the boat was close to the island now, and on the beach a great surf was breaking. I studied the surf. To beach the boat was not going to be possible. That thundering surf would crush her like an eggshell. There was nothing to do but go back to the ship. I turned the boat about, ordered my men to lay back—and had but done so when again I cried, "Backwater all!" and brought the boat to a stop.

"What's up, sir?" called one of my men, as I rose to my feet and began to throw off my clothes.

"I'm going to swim ashore," I replied. "Pull back to the ship and tell him I'll signal by burning two flares if it's not the *Polaris* that's wrecked. Then he'll sail on. I'll not be able to swim back; I'll wait with the castaways to be taken off by some other ship."



"Ye'll be broke to bits in the surf, sir!" cried one of my men; but his words gave me no concern. I was a powerful swimmer.

Stripped of all save my shirt and dungaree trousers, I took from the boat's locker two flares, wrapped them tight in oilskin, and secured them to my belt.

"All right, lads. Pull back aboard!" I ordered, and slipped over the boat's stern to the dark water.

A squall whined. Rain lashed down. The squall passed; the rain ceased. Looking for the bonfire, I could see nothing. I struck out harder. Louder and louder grew the roar of the surf. For a moment it came to me that perhaps there had been something in the warning voiced by one of the boat's crew. But there could be no going back now. A great roller lifted and swept me shoreward. It passed, and I was deep in a hollow. Another lifted me, hurled me shoreward, and broke with a roar. For a space I knew nothing; then, regaining my senses, and feeling the shore beneath me, I tried to get to my feet—only to be knocked down, and rolled over and over. When that roller receded, I crawled on all fours from the water, bruised, breathless, half drowned.

TO seaward all was darkness. The *South Star's* lights were lost in an oncoming squall. Looking again for the

bonfire, I saw only equal darkness. I shouted. No answer save the rage of the sea. Again and again I shouted. "Save your breath, you fool!" I muttered, and started toward where I judged the bonfire to have been—only to stumble, fall sprawling, and bruise myself anew. Presently, creeping half erect, I felt a huge boulder that cut from me the worst fury of the wind and rain, and crouched down. Remembering my flares, I felt for them. They were gone. . . . Hour after hour, while the furious night dragged on, I crouched shivering under the boulder, feeling as though no whole bone were left.

When at last dawn came, I staggered from the rocky foreshore to the grass-grown slope of the island. Here and there were bushes, and wind-twisted trees. I shouted. No answer. "Save your breath," I muttered; and pausing to scan the steep slope, saw high above me a rock wall at the foot of which was a cave. "Good! That's where they'll be," I thought; and trembling with cold and exhaustion, slowly made my way on bleeding feet up the slope.

It seemed an eternity ere I at last came to the cave, and saw just outside it a heap of blackened embers. My pulses quickened at sight of them. I shouted, and had no answer. "They'll be asleep," I thought, and entered the cave. A little within it, I stopped.

And then, as my eyes became accustomed to the gloom, I saw, outstretched and motionless at the end of the cave, a figure indistinct in a long oilskin coat, its face hidden by a sou'wester, its hands hidden by mittens such as sailors wear when steering. Kneeling, I laid a hand upon the castaway's shoulder.

The sleeper stirred; then, removing the sou'wester, sat up. Soft brown curls fell in a cloud about the oilskin-clad shoulders. Bright brown questioning eyes looked into my face. You could have bowled me over with a feather! It was a girl of maybe eighteen.

"Who are you? What ship are you from?" I cried.

"The *Polaris*," came the calm reply. "When was she wrecked? Where are the rest of her people?" I cried.

"She's not wrecked that I know of. The mate went back aboard," she answered, her tones as casual as though nothing were odd about the situation.

Thinking that it must be a dream, I stared incredulously at her. "Who are you? What ship are you from?" she asked.

"I'm the *South Star's* second mate," I replied—and, come to the end of my tether, my every limb aching, slumped down.

She laid her oilskin coat over me, took my hands in hers and chafed them. "Try to sleep. I'll see if I can make a fire and warm you," she said. I lapsed into unconsciousness. . . .

When I came to my senses, day was almost gone. The girl was bending above me. Close to me was a little fire. "You must eat. I've got some shellfish and some sea-birds' eggs," she said. I sat up weakly. She put an arm about my shoulder, held me against her, and with her other hand set food to my lips. My strength came back a little as I ate.

"You're cool as though you were a sailor," said I. "What were you doing aboard the *Polaris*? How did you come to be here?"

"I'm her skipper's daughter; I've often sailed with him, but this voyage I stowed away," she answered.

"Stowed away?" I exclaimed.

"I wanted to see the race. The mate found me just after we sailed. Father was going to send me ashore," she replied, and added with a laugh: "He changed his mind because the crew all said I'd bring the ship good luck."

"But how do you come to be here?" I asked.

"Your turn now. How did you get washed overboard?" she replied, and sat down opposite me, with the firelight shining in her bright eyes. Gazing at her, I thought: "I'll wake up soon, in my cabin aboard the *South Star*."

"Go on. Your turn now," she repeated. So I told her how I came to be there; and at the end I said: "They've given me up for drowned, of course. They've sailed on." And then feeling horribly weak, I lay down again.

"You'd better sleep some more," urged the girl.

"You've not told me how you come to be here," I said.

Warmed by the fire, I lay dozing while she talked: now hearing a few words more or less clearly; now aware of only

the indistinguishable murmur of her voice. There was something about being locked in a cabin, and being allowed out only at evening. There was something about a bag of salt, and a boat loaded with barrels. And then I heard plainly, with a little laugh in the words: "I found the cave and hid, and the mate went back to the ship." And then, bending above me, she said: "I'm wasting my breath. You're too sleepy to listen. I'll tell you all about it later."

SOMETIME in the night I awakened. The girl lay asleep. I rose on an elbow and gazed at her face, the firelight shining on it. The roar of wind and sea were gone now. The thunder of the surf was fallen away. I rose and went unsteadily to the mouth of the cave. The storm was over.

"It isn't a dream," I said to myself, and went back and sat down by the girl. There was a sort of dizziness on me, my head clear at times, and then befuddled from my having been so rolled about by the surf on the rocky beach. The girl stirred and her lips moved.

"Dearest!" she murmured.

My bruises, my cut feet, were forgotten. I bent low, touched my lips to her soft cheek. She gave me back my kiss. And then her eyes opened wide and she sat up. And as though she were now for the first time aware of me, an amazed look came to her face. In a moment that look of amazement gave way to a meditative expression.

"Do you really think the *South Star* has sailed on?" she asked.



"Dearest!" she murmured—and gave me back my kiss. Then her eyes opened wide, and she sat up.

"There's no sure telling," I answered. "They may have stayed to look for me at the end of the storm." And it seemed to me that a sort of alarmed expression came to her eyes.

"My father's certain to have stayed to look for me," she said.

"One thing's sure: We must both go aboard the first ship that shows up," said I.

"Yes—both of us," she agreed, her voice very eager.

I moved to take her in my arms. And then that vile dizziness came on again. "Hold me. I'll be all right. I got a bit knocked about in the surf," I said. And with my head in her lap, I drowsed off.

WHEN I came to my senses, I was in a bunk beside which stood a young man who stared at me with an amused look. "Well, how in blazes are you?" he asked, and before I could speak added: "So you're second mate of the *South Star*, eh? Well, I'm second mate here. How's tricks?" Giving me no chance to answer, he went on: "You made quite a hit with the skipper's daughter, eh? She's been asking to come nurse you. But not on your life! Not this trip, my lad! The skipper'd let you peg out before he'd let her out of her cabin."

"When were we picked up? How did she come to be on the island? Why is she locked in her cabin?" I asked.

"One thing at a time, sailor!" he laughed. "We picked you up yesterday morning, and you seemed about half dead. Just as we had you aboard, along came the *South Star* to look for you, so we signaled your skipper that you weren't worth bothering about, seeing you were unfit for duty—and the race was on again."

"Why's the skipper's daughter locked in her cabin? How did she come on the island?" I asked.

"She's locked up because she's a little devil, and was on the island for the same reason. Dropping salt in our fresh-water tank, confound her!" he replied.

"Dropping salt in the fresh-water tank? What do you mean?" I asked.

"Just what I say," he retorted. "There's a bag of salt missing from the ship's stores."

"But why should she drop it in the fresh water?" I asked.

"Because she's got a grouch at her dad, and wants him to lose the race and his bet. She knew we'd have to stop for

fresh water, and when the mate was sent ashore with a boatload of empty barrels, she begged to be allowed to go with him. The skipper was a fool to let her, for of course the little devil wandered off just so that the mate'd have to go look for her when he was ready to go back to the ship. And then that blow had to come along, so that he had to hurry aboard without her, or else lose the boat in the surf. And now she wants to come and nurse you! I'll bet there's some infernal trick up her cuff! The prettier they are, the worse liars they are, and I'd like to have her over my knee, confound her!"

"Why should she want the skipper to lose his bet? What is the bet?" I questioned.

"I don't know; you don't know; nobody knows," he replied. "All I know is that every man aboard this ship gets a nice little bonus when we whip the *South Star*."

A gray-haired man entered. "Well, how do you feel?" asked the skipper of the *Polaris*.

"Pretty good, sir, thank you," said I.

"Think you could put your weight on the ropes?" he asked.

"Maybe I could; but I'm second mate of the *South Star*, sir," I replied.

"That's all right," said he. "I've signaled your skipper, and he's released you to me. His third mate can act second mate in your place. One of my best men's laid up, and I'm handicapped. I need you badly. It's only fair play."

FOR a moment I hesitated, unwilling to go back on my own ship. And yet, with one of her best sailors laid up, the *Polaris* was at a disadvantage. And then I thought of the girl. Well, if she had a quarrel with her dad, it was none of my affair. "All right, sir," said I. "If my skipper's willing, it goes with me." I climbed from my bunk, feeling pretty stiff and groggy still. The skipper hurried off. Having put on some oilskins the *Polaris'* second mate dug out for me, I went out to the deck. The crew were all forward, tightening the braces.

A soft voice called to me. With her face framed in an open port, the girl was looking out on the deck. She beckoned me, and hidden from her dad by the break of the poop above, I stepped to the port. "Quick!" she whispered, laughing into my eyes, and pursed her lips. I kissed her, and hurried off to take my place at the ropes.

All day the ships ran neck and neck, sprays driving over them, neither able to gain on the other. At dusk we saw the *South Star's* lights. I went unseen to the girl's window then, and found her looking out on the deck. "I'm ashamed of you for going back on your ship," she whispered. "If you love me, you'd want the *South Star* to win."

"Why do you want her to?" I asked. "Dad's a cranky old fool," she replied. "He never lets me do what I want. If you really loved me, you'd not help him to win."

"I'm between the devil and the deep sea," said I. "A sailor has to do his job."

"Oh, yes, and have a girl in every port," she retorted, and added: "And you think me a devil, do you? You didn't when we were on that island." And then I thought of her on the island. Just the two of us, together in the cave.

"COME on and kiss me. I don't care which ship wins," said I.

"Sure of that?" she teased.

"Sure," I assented.

"Then slip forward now that it's dark, and cut away the fore topsail halyards. Then I'll kiss you," she said.

"I can't do that," I replied.

"You're like all sailors. You think you can play with a girl. Well, you can't play with me!" she retorted, and shut the port in my face. I rapped again and again on the port, and had no answer.

Day came. Watching for her whenever I passed near her port, I saw the girl but once all day. And that time she looked at me with tears in her eyes, and scornfully closed the port. . . .

For three days the ships drove neck and neck, with every rope at almost the breaking strain. The third night came in dark but starry, with a wild squally wind. Far ahead of us the harbor lights shone through the murk. And still the two ships were driving, neck and neck; every man standing handy by the ropes, while squall after squall whined over the dark sea.

"A draw's no good," I remembered the skipper of the *South Star* saying, and wondered what the bet could be. And then, watching the just discernible *South Star*, I suddenly saw her little main skysail blow to ribbons. All hands aboard the *Polaris* saw it too, and a high cheer rose. And then in my mind's eye I saw the girl's face as she lay in the cave and heard her murmur "Dearest," and felt

her kiss on my lips again. "You think you can play with a girl," I heard her say, and: "Slip forward and cut the fore topsail halyards. Then I'll kiss you."

What did it matter to me which ship won? All the ships on the sea could go to blazes, for all I cared.

"All's fair in love," I said to myself; and as a black cloud drove over the stars, I drew my knife from its sheath and ran forward. Digging the blade-point deep in the topsail halyards, I twisted it quickly, making a rough cut that no one would suspect, then sped swiftly away.

Shouts and curses rose from the *Polaris'* deck as her fore topsail slid down. But when the halyards were repaired and the sail hoisted again, dawn was breaking. A mile or so ahead, the *South Star* was entering the harbor, with flags flying gayly at her mastheads. As the *Polaris* silently followed, I made my way to the girl's port. It was shut. I rapped on it. Her face appeared. Laying a hand on my knife, I gestured to her, letting her know that I had done as she had asked. She laughed behind the closed port, and threw me a kiss. But when I signed to her to open the port, she closed the curtain instead, though peeping from behind it, she laughed again and threw me another kiss. And then, with some of the *Polaris'* crew approaching, I had to move off. A boat was coming from the *South Star*, my own skipper in its stern.

AS the *South Star's* skipper stepped to the poop of the *Polaris*, the girl came from the chart-room. He took her hand in his, put an arm about her, drew her to him and kissed her. She gave him kisses for kisses.

Together they turned to the *Polaris'* skipper.

"The world's mine, Captain!" said the skipper of the *South Star*.

"Take her and good luck! I never wanted my daughter to marry a sailor, but you won her fairly," replied the skipper of the *Polaris*, and added: "No credit to her, the little sea vixen!"

Laughing, the girl looked from one to the other; then noticed me, where I stood close by. And Lordy, how I hated her! And when she spoke, what a poor fool I felt: for then I remembered that meditative look that had come to her eyes in the cave.

"All's fair in love, eh, sailor?" she said, laughing in my face. "Some one has to lose."

KIOGA of the

By WILLIAM CHESTER

Illustrated by Jeremy Cannon

The Story Thus Far:

UPON the rocky coast of Nato'wa—a strange forest region north of Siberia, warmed by volcanic fires and inhabited by progenitors of the American Indian—we had been wrecked: John La Salle, Captain Scott and his sailors and I. We had come upon a desperate venture: the rescue of other castaways—the scientist James Munro, founder of the museum of which I was curator; Beth and Dan La Salle, daughter and son of the wealthy man who had financed Munro's expedition; and Lincoln Rand, better known as Kioga the Snow Hawk, grown to powerful manhood among the Indians of Nato'wa after his missionary parents had died.

A marauding crew of gold-hunters, we knew, had made a safe landing ahead of us; we must be on guard against them and the hostile Shoni Indians.

I set out alone in search of our friends, and found one of them, Kioga the Snow Hawk; and he led us to the others.

A happy reunion of our party followed with Beth La Salle and Munro and his quaint factotum Flashpan; but Dan La Salle had been captured by the Shoni, and we rescued him from them only after he had been tortured. For this expedition our party had been divided. And with Kioga, Munro, Flashpan and the Indian boy Tokala, I was trapped in a series of vast caverns in the gigantic mountain range beyond which lived, it was said, the blue-eyed People of the Tusk. Wandering by torchlight far into this rocky maze, we came upon a royal burial-chamber; here Munro hung about Tokala's neck a golden plaque we found. Later we came out into the open air, and saw men working with great prehistoric mastodons in harness; and were ourselves set upon and captured by the People of the Tusk.

In this adventure we had become separated from Kioga; otherwise we were lucky enough, however; for when our captors caught sight of the ancient

golden plaque about Tokala's neck, they treated us with the utmost consideration. For their king had recently died, and left no successor, and the nobles were about to choose a ruler. An ancient prophecy had foretold the coming of a great prince to rule over them, who should be recognized by the golden ceremonial plaque worn about his neck; and lo—here was this young newcomer Tokala, wearing this revered badge of royalty! So the nobleman Mahri, leader of our captors, saw a chance to make a king of this youth now in his power, and thus make himself the real ruler of the land.

Kioga's fortunes, however, were far different. He was imprisoned with the slaves; and made a deadly enemy of the noble Semya, when in self-defense he turned a whip upon his tormentor. After some days, however, Kioga succeeded in escaping. And it chanced that he was able to rescue the Princess Loalli when the mammoth she was riding stumbled; but in so doing he earned the jealous hatred of Mahri, who was in love with Loalli. But Kioga had made friends with the professional thief Ameeg and his pickpocket clan—and Ameeg employed his arts to disguise Kioga so successfully that even we who knew him so well failed to recognize him when he presented himself before Prince Mahri, in our presence, seeking employment.

In Mahri's service the Snow Hawk (in his guise of Akra, a free-lance warrior) performed various tasks so ably that presently Mahri entrusted him with a scouting mission among the tribes in the northern mountains—where, it was rumored, revolt was brewing. (*The story continues in detail.*)

MOUNTED upon a great riding mammoth provided by this employer, Kioga set out one foggy night and crossed the river, landing in a thicket of giant reeds. The Snow Hawk was about to push forward along the trail when his

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Unknown Land

The great tradition of Jules Verne and Rider Haggard is ably carried on in this vividly imagined novel.

keen ear caught the murmur of voices ahead. Dismounting, he crept forward—then halted and held his breath to catch the words, which carried clearly down the misty wind.

"He was to come this way," said one voice guardedly.

"What does he look like? Suppose we should mistake another for him?"

"There is a scar upon his cheek, which runs from jaw to temple. One eye is partly closed. He answers to the name of Akra."

"Will he suspect?"

"We will not give him time."

"I do not like this sticking in the back."

"Nor I; but who dares thwart the noble Semya?"

Waiting to hear no more, Kioga crept back to his mount. In some way Semya knew of his mission. The false front of Akra, the mercenary warrior, could therefore only serve to betray him to the enemy waiting to waylay him. And so, working hastily with the solvent Ameeg



With a mighty swing the mammoth catapulted Meru into space.

had supplied him, he removed all traces of his disguise. Then remounting the great beast, he pushed boldly on again.

A moment later, on three sides, he saw the loom of other mounts converging on his path, one blocking it, two others ranging up to crowd his beast on either side, while on the ground three robe-wrapped figures waited. Lanterns, burning oil, were now uncovered, throwing orange light upon the group. A challenge greeted him.

"Who are you, warrior?"

"My name is Vardo," said Kioga.



"So?" a muffled voice said suspiciously, adding: "Dismount for questioning."

Kioga did as bidden, and as he lightly touched the ground, flung back his overrobe in such a manner that it covered his own naked *kuri*. The three dismounted men approached him swiftly. "Be sure of him," warned one of those who watched from mammoth-back; and in response, the nearest of the three rushed in and with his blade thrust for the Snow Hawk's middle.

Kioga took the thrust upon his ready *kuri*, parrying the other's weapon up. The contact brought them face to face; and by the flickering lights, the eyes of his attacker showed astonishment. "A moment! Wait!" he warned the other two, about to lend him aid. "I see no scar, no drooping lid. We have mistaken you, my friend. It was another we awaited."

"Well for you that you found that out in time," Kioga said heatedly. "I am on Semya's business. Were I to tell him that you sought my life, it would go ill with all of you, my friends."

The men fell back, chagrined. "On Semya's business, even as ourselves! We were in wait for one whose face is scarred to—"

"Quiet, hollow-skull," one of the others checked the speaker sharply.

"Hollow-skulls, the pack of you," Kioga interrupted with fine scorn. "Too full from swigging *lohe* for attending to a noble's orders! The one you seek has passed the while you dallied in the public places. Oh, I would not be you—when Semya finds that you have let him slip between your palms!"

There was a silence, growing from the consternation which these words had implanted. "The fog—we came at the appointed hour—" This from their leader, stammering in his deep confusion.

"The fog has penetrated to your wits," Kioga answered swiftly. "You talk when action is required. Upon your bulls and after him! He cannot yet be out of reach."

THE words set spur to their own thoughts. Unhindered now, Kioga remounted, and in their company gave swift pursuit to the figment of his own creation. Hard as they rode,—and a mammoth's long slow pace devours distance,—they did not travel far, as crows would fly. Within an hour after leaving the river-bank behind them, they were already in the high foothills surrounded

by deep forest, and compelled to follow climbing roads and twisting trails whose hairpin turns might bring them hours later in view of the same road on which they had earlier passed.

The road, Kioga noted with appreciative eyes, was yet another testimony to the skill of M'Anda's engineers, and the ceaseless labor of the slaves and toiling mammoths, being sound and level to the outer shoulders. Where slides of rock and earth had torn these, they had been rebuilt and shrewdly braced with strong sustaining timbers from the forests on the slopes; and on more hazardous turns and steep approaches, rock walls had been erected.

HOUR on hour the pace continued. Hard though they be pressed, mammoths show a seeming disregard of weariness up to a certain point—beyond which neither goading nor entreaties will move them forward until they have recovered energy by rest and feeding. With this in view each beast, before the ordinary journey through the peaks, is loaded up more heavily with fodder than with any other single item.

It is the special duty of the cultivator-slaves to grow and harvest several varieties of moss, grass, sedges and wild thyme, which form the mammoth's chief food. These slaves, who have no other duties whatsoever, then dry and mix the several plant-stuffs and add thereto a concentrated vegetable substance, used throughout the realm by man and beast alike as a stimulant—as races elsewhere in the world use tea, *maté*, or coffee. The nourishing plant mixture then is pressed by weights into the form of solid mattresses, ingeniously bound with cords in such a way that a simple rip releases just the proper ration for a working beast, leaving the remainder intact.

A portion of the annual harvest is by wetting and compression molded into solid blocks, for storage in marked places on the roads, so that at any time the traveler on his great ship of the mountains may help himself to fuel-food for his mammoth by simply taking out of storage this bricked fodder and beating it loose and ready for consumption.

The dried-out stuff is so disposed upon the mammoth's back that it may first serve as a hard cushion for the rider; which cushion, being drawn upon at every feeding time, ultimately is consumed, until naught but a heavy pad remains between the rider and his mount.



Placer knew what was expected of him, but was loath to leave his master.

Unfortunately the mammoths of Kioga's party had not been so equipped for a long trip. Along the way, between two roadway stations of supply, one of the bulls threw up its trunk and checked, refusing to take another forward step. All other methods failing, its driver had recourse to deep and subtle means by which these mahouts of the M'Anda kingdoms swear. In loving tones he now bespoke the beast:

"O thou sweet-smelling herb! Thy tail is as a lovely maiden's braid; thy tusks are like the sickles of the bright new moon; thy trunk drips melted honey; thine eyes are soft as dusk in summertime; thy feet tread as petals fall. Condescend, O Powerful, to move one after one until we reach that yonder height, where thou shalt banquet full on scented plants. . . . What, no response? Then shall I tickle thee with my sharp goad, O byblow of a misbegotten bull? One little forward step! What, shall entreaty fail? Epitome of laziness! Here is to quicken thee, O giant stench!"

But neither cajolery nor blows can sway a mammoth with its mind made up; and since they were in haste, regretfully they left the beast behind, roped to a rock. Its driver mounted up behind Kioga, and on they went until another bull refused to move. This time a station of supply was near; and pausing to refresh their animals, Kioga and the warriors threw themselves to rest beside a quickly kindled fire near the road.

They had not been long seated when from the upper heights a train of laden bulls descended, accompanied by slaves and warriors afoot. A score of animals, each laden to capacity, moved down the road toward the City of the Kings. Greetings passed between their drivers and Kioga's companions of the road, and presently a pair dropped out to gossip for an hour with men so lately from the capital city.

Semya, by their account, had formed alliance with several other lesser nobles dominant among the mountain cities, gaining their support in mammoths, men and arms. None of the soldiery knew in what cause they had been enlisted, save that it paid them double wages for the period of a full moon. Beasts, warriors and weapons were to gain admittance to the City of the Kings, ostensibly to honor the new king. But secret orders bade them be in readiness for anything, armed fully at all times. Among the warriors there was speculation on the reason for such mystery; but to Kioga it was all too clear.

Shrewd Semya planned a *coup* of one kind or another at the capital, but whether before or after the elevation of the king, remained uncertain. Enough to know that it was planned; it now remained to learn the full extent of all the preparations. What more was to be ascertained could best be gleaned in Semya's own home city. This famous stronghold lay at a distance of some forty miles, or twice that far, reckoning in the turnings of the road.

The warriors soon departed to catch up with their train, swearing that no mammoth had passed them on the road. But where an hour since Kioga would have wished to turn about, it pleased him now to argue that they had been deceived. "He was suspicious of ambush, and so evaded you. Likewise he would have hidden as they passed and then gone on. If we would take him we must follow."

MERU, leader of the ambush which had thus far failed, sat deep in thought and finally voiced it, his eyes upon Kioga with an odd intentness. "I cannot think how he could have evaded us.

He was described as tall, much like yourself, and wearing such a robe. His beast was to be patched with gray upon the neck, as is your own—no common mark. Indeed, save for our glimpse of your face, you must have fallen to our *kuris*, so like are you to him we waited for."

Kioga laughed to hide a faint uneasiness. "Death skimmed me close," he answered. "I vow it never has passed closer."

"I cannot understand," persisted the other stubbornly.

"Better to be off in search of him than sitting idle here," the Snow Hawk answered. "Time may resolve your doubts. Meanwhile, remember that Semya is a hard master, not easy with those servants who fail him."

"That is the truth, at least," said Meru, still thoughtful. He rose; whereat all did likewise, mounted, and were on their way again. The route was now at greater altitude and climbing steadily. The road, from being broad, grew steep and ever narrower as they slowly neared their objective, Semya's stronghold city. Between the place of earlier pausing and their destination, a deep and seemingly bottomless gorge cut through the mountains. Across this narrow chasm hung a bridge of heavy planking laid on solid beams, which were anchored to the rock on either side with chain. Across this bridge the mammoths thundered, and on its other side came to a division in the road.

Meru, until this moment still wrapped in his thoughts, there checked his animal and called a parley. "We cannot know which road this Akra took," he said. "We must divide, going separate ways." He turned then to Kioga. "We two are equal to their several. Let us go on together to the left, while they search out the right-hand road."

Since this arrangement did not affect their ultimate arrival at Semya's stronghold city, Kioga found nothing objectionable in Meru's proposal, and suffered him to mount behind him. Meru's men on their two beasts took one trail; while Meru and Kioga took the other, more precipitous and perilous by far.

A WHILE they rode without event, until they reached a turn, below which there stretched downward a sheer drop of several hundred feet, terminating in a chaotic heap of broken stone.

Suspecting nothing until this instant, Kioga heard the voice of Meru speak

the word that checked the mount they rode together, and simultaneously felt the prick of metal near his spine.

Meru's voice was in his ear. "Get down! And do not turn or I will run my *kuri* through you."

Kioga obeyed, without a word.

"Your weapons. Throw them on the ground," the other ordered, and again Kioga acceded, avoiding the temptation to resist. "Now turn about," said Meru.

"Wherefore such great precaution, Meru?" Kioga asked, in hope of gaining a moment of time. "'Tis clear that you intend to kill me, though why you should, I do not know."

"You know too much," answered Meru. "Think you that we should let you live to carry back to Semya the fact that we have lost our quarry? Life is too good. You die, that he may never learn of it."

"But he will learn that you have murdered me."

"When I have done, no one will ever know that you have gone. Look behind you, brother. Your bones will all be rent apart when your body strikes below. I shall not even hear it fall, so deep is that valley. But enough of talk. Prepare to die."

With the words Meru fixed his eye upon the point below which beat Kioga's heart. The Snow Hawk did not flinch, and Meru paid him one last compliment: "You are a bold one, brother. I must admire you. But life means much to me. And so, prepare. . . . *Now!*"

CHAPTER XV

IN Mahri's splendid house, upon the main road in the City of the Kings, the handsome noble sat wrapped in bitterness; what had galled Mahri so deeply was a remark, purporting to have been made by Loalli herself, that if it came to choosing between the noble Mahri and the slave who had saved her from the maddened bull, her choice would fall upon the slave and not the noble.

Whether a true quotation or not, young Mahri well knew the candid high-born Loalli to be quite capable of saying it; and raging inwardly, he swore to find that long-sought slave of whom she spoke so highly. Loalli should have her wish, he promised himself grimly; but the slave, when she received him, would be less well-favored than on the first occasion!

Since his new servant Akra was not available, Mahri called into action several trusted employees of longer standing, and set for them the task of running down all clues concerning that elusive slave, promising a thousand *kuls* to whosoever found him. Had Mahri known that Akra and the slave were one and the same person, he would have trebled that reward. But he did not know; nor did Munro, Flashpan, Tokala or myself, who sat in on these conferences, all unconscious of Kioga's huge deception, and completely convinced, by now, that he was dead.

WE had the freedom of the city by this time, a freedom which each of us made use of in his own peculiar way. Tokala, when he went abroad, was ever accompanied by a heavy guard who bore him in a curtained palanquin, as was the custom of the high-born who desired to pass through streets too narrow to admit their mammoths. Along his route he daily received such cheers and adulation from the throngs as left no doubt about his popularity. He acted well his ordained part, emerging unspoiled through these demonstrations.

Flashpan, with a faultless nose for gold and kindred treasure, roamed here and there in search of the sources which supplied the royal goldsmiths with the metal which they worked. He took with admirable ease to this new life among a strange and half-barbaric people. His sole regrets were for his faithful dog Nugget, and that companion of his checkered past, the almost human little rhesus monkey Placer. Lacking his old pistols, with which he was a dead shot, Flashpan soon acquired no mean skill with the native *kuri*, causing some embarrassment to us by neatly skewering one of Mahri's own warriors who dared to tweak one of his long mustaches.

Munro, following his scientific bent, gave his attention to deciphering the ancient M'Anda records. Translating these, he gained knowledge of their staggering antiquity. For if the facts recorded thus were true, the T'emaho were proved the oldest race on earth, a human fragment of well-nigh incalculable age, survivals, like their mammoths, of the glorious Age of Mammals.

When early European man was rising from the twilight of the ages to defend himself against the beasts with his first clumsy hand-ax, men of M'Anda had already learned to work meteoric iron.

When Egypt's ingenuity, six thousand years ago, was still at work reducing pictographs into phonetic signs to form a written language, the simple and ingenious M'Anda form of writing had already been in use for centuries. Scribes of that far-distant day in Egypt had been compelled to cut their thoughts in stone. The old-time T'emaho had even then known the use of ink made from the soot upon his cooking-pots, mixed with gum and water, and applied with a split and pointed reed upon the thin but lasting membrane of a mammoth's stomach.

Munro could not well connect the living men of M'Anda with the Incas or the Aztecs, since the latter had been of uniformly dark skin and eyes, whereas the T'emaho varied in complexion. And so he hazarded the guess, and wrote it in his notebooks, that they might be the root-stock of the famed Mound Builders, surviving where their continental cousins had vanished.

THAT penchant on the part of Flashpan for getting into trouble often took our thoughts from scientific subjects. It had become Flashpan's habit, in the endless round of seeking hidden treasure, to visit daily with the M'Anda barbers, smiths, hucksters, menders and men of trade—gossipers all—who might throw light upon his search.

In one deep drinking-cellar he was already by way of being one of its best customers, imbibing freely of the native mildly stimulating *loke*. The drink had the effect upon Flashpan of but quickening his already active wit. And, for all his years, Flashpan had now acquired quite a reputation as a fighter and a comical eccentric, on whose words men had but to hang if they desired to laugh. Not only men, indeed.

For in the land of M'Anda, as in other earthly realms, the drinking-places have their share of loitering women; of these, one in particular returned a smile to Flashpan's shameless ogling. Having learned not much of value from the men with whom he spoke, Flashpan convinced himself, aided by a swift glance at the lady's pleasant person, that he might gain knowledge of the kind he sought from her.

But what he learned put from his mind all thought of gold and treasure. It left Flashpan, for once, without a word to say, albeit his head was full of leaping thoughts that tumbled on each other confusedly—for from the woman's

lips, loosened by the *lohe* with which he plied her, Flashpan had a tale straight from the den of thieves over which one Ameeg presided.

One of Ameeg's own men, with whom she had been friendly, had blurted out the fact, in an unguarded moment, that Ameeg had abandoned his lucrative career of thieving and turned instead to politics—had joined forces with a former slave, named Akra, and— But Flashpan interrupted there.

"His name was Akra, didst thou say?"

"Akra, indeed. But what of that? It is a common name."

"Mayhap, mayhap. What did he look like, this slave who could make a thief turn honest man?"

"Oh, tall," the woman answered vaguely, "and very handsome—until Ameeg painted on his other face."

"But why—his *other* face?"

"He had escaped the dungeons of the slaves."

The gulp of *lohe* Flashpan had taken all but choked him.

"The dungeons of the slaves," he echoed. "When? How did they paint him?"

"Upon the day the nobles came," she answered, adding a good description of the mask Kioga had worn since the hour he quit the den of Ameeg. Her facts but served to plunge Flashpan the deeper into speculation. Now that he had a grain of hope, he scrutinized it with suspicion, loath to reveal to Munro and the others what might later prove to be without foundation. Yet here was something not to be let go until investigated. Who better could inform him further than that sly cutpocket of whom the woman had spoken—Ameeg the thief?

ASCERTAINING where Ameeg might be sought, Flashpan thrust a handful of coins into her fingers and bustled out upon the street. His carry-chair, with which all higher members of Mahri's household were provided, was ready and waiting. Flashpan leaped spryly in, and snapped quick commands to his bearers, who conveyed him down into the close and foggy warrens in the lower city, haunted by such as old Ameeg.

He felt his chair set down, and raising the curtain poked forth his head turtle-wise, to look about him in that forbidding place and sniff the air distastefully.

"Highness has arrived," one of his bearers murmured deferentially.

"'Highness,' bah!" growled Flashpan, and set foot gingerly upon the pavement. "Be off, the lot of you! I shall return on foot." His gesture sent them on their way, their copper ear-bells jingling.

FLASHPAN stood alone amid an utter silence, peering round about him in the shadowed doorways and hidden coverts. Then he took a metal coin and dropped it on the pavement, waiting. A head thrust from an upper window.

"What do you want, who come by night with such a clatter?"

"I seek Ameeg the thief."

There came a jeering laugh from up above. "Who seeks him not!" A metal grate slammed with a ringing crash. Flashpan, indignant, walked on a way. He tripped upon a foot thrust from a doorway. "Ho, there!" cried the little miner, dragging forth a man who lay within. "Get up. Direct me to the thief Ameeg."

"Would that I could! He has just picked my pocket," the other said.

"Your foolish fault, for letting him come near," said Flashpan.

"Be careful," warned the other. "He will hear your coins rattle."

"'Tis what I wish, if only I may come upon him," said Flashpan, proceeding on his way and jingling his *kuls* at every step. For in the lower City of the Kings, there is a truthful saying that when money rings, it is like the smell of mammoth-cheese to rats. But to Flashpan, it seemed that all the rats were keeping to their holes. He went unchallenged, and saw no one until at last, having put his money-bag away, he came upon a hunched-up figure weeping on a doorway. Touched, Flashpan drew near.

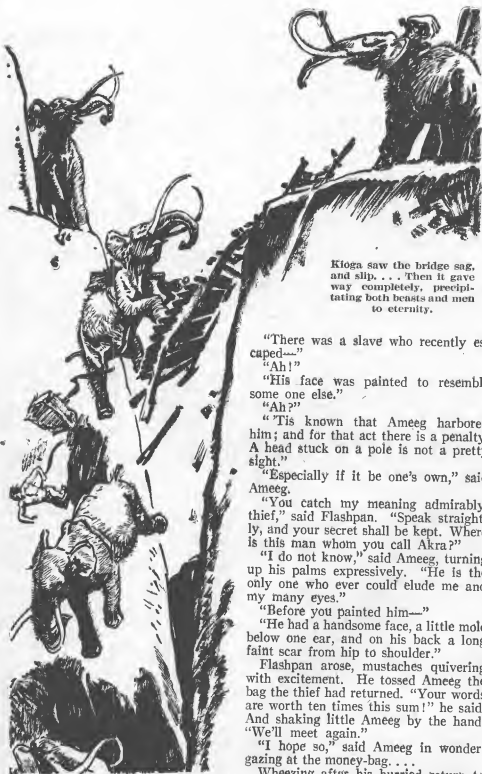
"Why do you cry, my little one?" he asked in the soft M'Anda tongue.

"I have been robbed," croaked the other, with a fresh outburst of sobs.

"Ameeg?" Flashpan demanded fiercely, and when the other's shoulders shook: "He is an ogre, this vile pocket-picker. But never mind. Here is to console you—" He reached in for his money-bag, to find it gone. "*He-ya!* I likewise have been robbed! Again this Ameeg!"

"Again Ameeg," agreed the other quietly, rising up to bow in mock deference, holding forth the while Flashpan's money-bag, and showing his seamed old face at last. "You search for me?"

"Wal, I'll be cussed!" exclaimed Flashpan. "That shore was slick."



Kioga saw the bridge sag, and slip. . . . Then it gave way completely, precipitating both beasts and men to eternity.

"There was a slave who recently escaped—"

"Ah!"

"His face was painted to resemble some one else."

"Ah?"

"Tis known that Ameeg harbored him; and for that act there is a penalty. A head stuck on a pole is not a pretty sight."

"Especially if it be one's own," said Ameeg.

"You catch my meaning admirably, thief," said Flashpan. "Speak straightly, and your secret shall be kept. Where is this man whom you call Akra?"

"I do not know," said Ameeg, turning up his palms expressively. "He is the only one who ever could elude me and my many eyes."

"Before you painted him—"

"He had a handsome face, a little mole below one ear, and on his back a long faint scar from hip to shoulder."

Flashpan arose, mustaches quivering with excitement. He tossed Ameeg the bag the thief had returned. "Your words are worth ten times this sum!" he said. And shaking little Ameeg by the hand. "We'll meet again."

"I hope so," said Ameeg in wonder, gazing at the money-bag. . . .

Wheezing after his hurried return to Mahri's house, Flashpan burst in upon Munro and me as if a war had been declared, and broke the news excitedly. "Kioga's Akra. Akra is Kioga. He's alive, s'help me! He works for Mahri. Oh, didn't I tell ye that cat had nine lives? That rumor of his death among

"Your pardon?" queried Ameeg with a leering grin.

"I said," Flashpan replied, "that I had long desired to meet you."

"Tis done. What do you want of this poor thief?"

the slaves was bunk!" And having dropped that shell among us, Flashpan sat down in near-exhaustion.

"It clicks," said Munro to me.

"What d'ye mean, clicks?" said Flashpan.

"We had an inkling of it from another source," I answered, for Munro, and postponing explanations led Flashpan through the crowds which now camped perpetually on Mahri's doorstep. We paused some streets away, and entered a low doorway in a shadowed alley, Flashpan following me. Upon my knock, repeated in a way agreed upon, a door was opened. Within a dimly lighted room an old man stood, who greeted us in the M'Anda tongue, and told in substance before Flashpan what he had earlier told Munro and me.

"My name is Mingo. One of my guards helped me to flee the slave-dungeons. While there I met and talked with Kioga. He was not slain, but escaped, my robe his only cover."

"How came you to be in the dungeons?" demanded Flashpan.

"I am a Shoni, part of the outer world, like you. My mother wandered here before my birth. When I was still a child, she told me by what route she came beneath the mountains. My memory is good. I wish to see my father's land before I die. If you will go with me, mayhap I can show the way of your escape."

Flashpan turned to me.

"If Kioga was alive, why didn't he give us some sign of it when he came to visit Mahri, lookin' like a soldier of the T'emaho?"

"He must have had a reason," I replied. "Perhaps he feared we might unwittingly betray him. We'll hear from him when he is ready. Meanwhile we'll act as if we didn't know he was still alive, and go with Mingo. If he can show us the path his mother used, we shall be ready, any time Kioga is."

CHAPTER XVI

UPON a mammoth bearing the forehead shield of Mahri's stables, we entered the deep sub-mountain burrows of the T'emaho, free from interference, and with our path made smoother by that identifying sign. But unhappily, although he led us accurately for a way, old Mingo's memory finally proved at fault, so that the route his mother long ago had described to him must be lo-

cated, if at all, by sheer deductive reasoning on our part.

We were compelled to think back to our first entrance into the hermit kingdoms of the T'emaho, seeking to choose from among the many abandoned borings that one which most nearly paralleled our route of entry. Logic said that since the mother of old Mingo had been one of the Shoni people, she must have made her way into this area north of her ordinary haunts by some route other than the tombs, which had presented to us such obstacles as no lone woman could have overcome.

SINCE Mingo's aid was exhausted, we chose at random one of the nearest tubes, closed off by rough-hewn barricades bearing a royal seal forbidding further labor here. By linking our great mount's chain to the lower logs, we thus could swing the barriers far enough aside to give us ingress.

The tunnel which we followed ended in a solid wall. Coming forth from it, we likewise tried out several others of varying length, eliminating one by one from consideration as that through which a stranger from the outer world might have passed.

We came at length upon a barrier so long untouched that its lower logs lay under several inches of rock-dust. Entering here, we found a lane of many turns and branches. Following its main artery to the farthest end, we saw this time not solid stony wall, but a chaotic mass of tumbled rock, evidence of the greatest hazard which the excavators ever faced, a cave-in of many years ago.

Having actual knowledge of the several branches of the abandoned tubes, and recollection of the route which we had followed upward through the tombs, it developed from our calculations that this old tunnel pierced the rock not far from where we and Kioga had passed. But though we suspected such proximity, lacking means of boring farther, we could conceive no way to bring it to a proof.

But suddenly our movements in and near the fallen rubble sent a darting shadow bounding almost from beneath our feet. One fleeting glimpse was all we had of that quick-moving form, but that sufficed. It told us that the Shoni forests could not be far away, not farther than that creature could have wandered searching for a place to den; for what we glimpsed had been a panther cub, half-grown, of a variety we had seen a

KIOGA OF THE UNKNOWN LAND

dozen times while roaming in Kioga's native wilderness.

Along some such route, perhaps this very one, old Mingo's mother must have passed, seeking, perhaps, escape from some great hunting-cat, only to fall captive to the race who had tunneled here before the cave-in had occurred to force a discontinuance of the work.

Following on the heels of the disappearing animal as far as crevices in the rock would permit, we brought up at last against a junction of the walls through which we could not squeeze.

Awhile we toiled, exerting all our strength upon the mammoth-goat, seeking to pry the rocks apart, that we might follow through. Our labors were in vain.

We paused, returned to refresh ourselves with water from the leather bag hung at our mammoth's shoulder, then once more crouched before the crevice, to study out some means of enlarging it. That this gave exit to the forest beyond the kingdoms of the T'emaho, we had no doubt, since through the crevice faintly came the scent of pine and hemlock.

AND suddenly, with straining ears and tilted head, Flashpan listened. He heard, as we did, from a distance yet with perfect clarity, the sound of singing. Our blood ran swifter in our veins. We knew that stirring chorus—the chant that fell from Shoni warriors' lips. Indeed, we even thought we recognized the leading voice for that of Kias, bound to the Snow Hawk by the closest ties of friendship. Flashpan let forth a yell.

"Kias! Can ye hear me? Kias!" Silence followed, and he called again, without result. Another pause ensued while we listened for the answer which would put us in contact with our friends beyond the hermit kingdoms of the T'emaho. But only the hollow echoes of his own voice returned to mimic him.

Some freak of the acoustics in these under-mountain caverns enabled us to hear them, but were our own voices being diverted elsewhere? Could they hear us? Again Flashpan signaled, but not now with his voice. Instead he whistled on a low peculiar note which echoed and reechoed in those tortured caverns. The sound of chanting ended.

Flashpan crouched before the crevice with a tense expectancy. And now a sound did come, a sound which I had heard somewhere before in my travels, without being able instantly to identify it. It was shrill and growing in in-

tensity. The explanation darted into mind, but not before the reality was among us.

The shrill sound multiplied, and then became embodied in a leaping shadow which sprang through air, alighting on Flashpan's shoulder. Placer the monkey hugged Flashpan's skinny neck, screeching and chattering monkey confidences into Flashpan's hairy ear. Whereas a man might not pass through the narrow clefts between the solid rock, this little keen-sensed creature had heard his master's call and easily passed among the crevices. Our contact with the outer world had been established!

"Ye've got a lot to say," grinned Flashpan, stroking his active pet, "but it's all over my head. Now, if ye c'd tell us how all our friends be out in the forests of the Shoni—" Flashpan paused, his blue eyes calculatingly askint. "Mebbe ye can't, but you *can* let 'em know we're still alive; and Miss La Salle at least'll be glad to know her man is still around."

I saw at once Flashpan's intent to make the agile little rhesus act as courier between ourselves and whoever were beyond the reach of our voices. Upon a strip of skin torn from his overrobe he scrawled a penciled message, to which I added my name. It read:

We ben tryin to git through the mountin an all air alive an kikin whats what out their with you look in Placer's collar fer this note send us an answer same way.

Flashpan tied the note flag-like to Placer's collar and faced him in the direction whence he had come. The bright-eyed little animal well knew what was expected of him, but was loath to leave the side of his master, so lately met with after so long a separation. Several times he started off, glancing back to see if Flashpan followed. Each time he returned with deep perplexity written on his wrinkled simian face. But Flashpan had a way with animals. Presently the rhesus went back into the crevice and did not now return.

IN silence, listening, we waited, all our hopes pinned on that agile flitting little form which bore our message to our friends outside. For though the kingdoms of the T'emaho were large enough for an entire race, to us they were a prison. As prisoners waiting for reprieve from their surrounding walls, so now we crouched expectantly. An hour passed, and two, before the long



In vestments of the royal house, Flashpan bore himself with comic majesty; from his hand a chain led back to an albino mammoth-calf. On this lesser mammoth sat Tokala, the king-to-be.

high call of Placer sounded once again; and like a ghost he swung into our presence.

Inside his collar was an answer, written on a strip of thin white bark in lieu of paper. Flashpan unrolled it, and by our smoking torches we read:

Your message received. Where are you? What can we do to help you? Now and then we hear a heavy thumping which seems to come from deep within the earth. Are these your efforts to escape, or what? Longer message being prepared. Good luck!

Dan La Salle.

"They hear a thumpin' in the ground," said Flashpan swiftly. "The T'emaho are gettin' nearer to the end of their tunnelin'. One of these fine days they'll break through. An' when they do, we'll make our get-away! We'll sure have news for Munro. But we can't linger here. Our place is in the tunnel of the T'emaho, if we're to leave the land of M'Anda."

We sent one last note to our friends, advising them of our intentions; dispatched the note by monkey-courier, and went as we had come. We thought to join with Munro and Tokala, to be on hand when the slaves holed through the tunnel, then to escape and meet our friends beyond the mountain wall which had until now held us incommunicado.

Well for our strength of heart and courage that we could not foresee events that yet remained between our hopes of liberty and their realization!

FOR what had occurred in the world outside during our adventure in the land of hermit people, I am indebted to a record kept with utmost faithfulness by Beth La Salle. With her permission I am free to quote from it.

Placer, Flashpan's little simian pet, faithfully returned to them with our last message, telling of our safety and the nature of our strange captivity.

Dan, who received the message, at once relayed it by Shoni Indian runner to his sister Beth, and turned his full attention to the sounds of distant digging emanating from somewhere deep within the mountain-side. It was an eerie sensation to listen to those muffled thuds and know them made by living men who knew of, but had never seen, the world beyond their peak-girt kingdom.

The sounds were intermittent, but increasing in volume, until one day they ceased entirely, as if all work had been abandoned; and this was true in fact, occasioned by the threat of cave-in which required full attention to the bracing of the tunnel ceiling.

Three days of silence passed, but Dan did not sit idly by. To dig through solid rock toward the sounds with the poor tools at his disposal was not practicable. Instead, he and his men attacked the stone at likely points of cleavage. These they enlarged, and deepened several fissures leading somewhere inward, until Dan could crawl in, and with sound from outside thus eliminated, listen to better purpose.

Upon the fourth day, thumping recommenced, continuing without a further interruption. Time and again Dan sought to gain attention from the unseen excavators, by blows struck with a heavy stone against the rock. He tapped in Morse, of which he had a working knowledge, in hopes that Munro, also familiar with that code, might hear and so communicate. But his efforts met with no success.

Undaunted by his failure, Dan made other preparations. Intending to blast a way toward his missing friends, he long ago had cached a good supply of powder, brought up from downriver. To this a stroke of luck had added several sticks of dynamite, stolen by one of his Indians from the mining-camp headquarters of the *Pirate's* gold-seeking company.

Of powder Dan packed a quantity into the inmost crevice of the rock, nesting in the blackish grains the sticks of high explosive. Ingenuity provided Dan with fuses made of twisted cedar-bark, which he had moistened, dipped in powder, then set out to dry. Into the explosive core he introduced the ends of two fuses, then with a buckskin blanket covered it and weighted all with dried-out sand and stones brought from the river, achieving thus a tolerable mine, which could be detonated from a distance by setting fire to the fuses.

Such preparations made, Dan kept his vigil. The rumblings beyond grew hourly louder. Now and again it seemed to him that other sounds came through the rock; sounds as of great horns hard blown—no doubt the trumpeting of laboring mammoths; and finally—this time beyond all doubt—the sound of human voices raised in mighty unison, followed instantly by hours of silence.

WHILE Dan kept watch, one of his red-skinned runners, who made liaison between the divided parties in the Shoni forests, brought news: Down at the miners' camp all was bedlam and excitement. Gold had been struck in quantity that men had never dreamed about before. Three full canoe-loads had been taken down the river, sack by sack, to their waiting ship the *Pirate*, and there been melted into rough ingots and stored aboard.

This preoccupation of the hostile miners with the hunt for mineral treasure worked to the advantage of Captain Scott and his men, who thereby went unmolested during the building of their

craft, now well advanced. The framework of a little ship already stood erected, like a skeleton, on which the men were now at toil attaching rough-hewn planks and reinforcing stringers. For sails they intended using the deer-skins brought in by the red-skinned friendlies, and cut and sewn together at the blockhouse by Beth La Salle, her father and the men there stationed.

So much and little more did Dan know of events out near the coast; for since Kioga, Flashpan and Munro, with Tokala and me, had vanished in the mountain caverns, Dan had not once relaxed the search for us.

One fact gave him cause for constant apprehension: Internal strife had long existed in the savage Shoni nations. The flash of scalping-knives was reported with a growing frequency. His runners told of war-bands moving on the rivers, freed of ice by an early spring thaw. And the blockhouse down the river lay directly in the path of such scalp-hunting parties.

Worst of all news came from the mining-camp. There had been firewater, killings and retaliations. Several cruel atrocities had been perpetrated by the miners on red-skinned visitors to their camp. A number had been shackled and forced to labor in the miners' frenzied search for quantities of gold. And the Shoni, now thoroughly aroused against the whites, would not discriminate between their persecutors and others with pale skins.

All the more cause, reflected Dan, to stand by to aid the Snow Hawk and his friends, if aid were needed in the final piercing of the rock. For with Kioga's knowledge of the Indian mind, chances of safety were vastly multiplied.

And with Dan waited Kias, lifelong friend of Kioga, who had persuaded near a score of Shoni braves to join him in his vigil. They speculated on what manner of men would presently come forth, and what was happening to us.

CHAPTER XVII

KIOGA was not the man to let himself be slain without a struggle; yet on the narrow ledge he had but little room in which to make a stand.

As Meru's blade licked forward, Kioga dodged, evading it by very little margin, and with the movement slipping abruptly until he had but hand-grip on

his ledge. Now he was utterly at Meru's mercy, had not a kindly fate intervened. For drawing back to thrust a second time, a whiplike blow across one cheek distracted Meru, accidentally flicked by his mammoth's swishing tail. It was a sharp and painful cut, and angrily he kicked the beast behind him, full against one of its ankles, which was red and sore from scuffing on the long up-trail.

THEN Meru returned to his job of murder—and an instant later yelled in terror. For a hairy trunk had curled around his waist. Then with a mighty swing the mammoth catapulted Meru screaming into space. His yells grew fainter as he plummeted.

Kioga hauled himself upon the ledge, one eye upon the mammoth for fear of being dealt with likewise by the pain-crazed brute. Instead he heard it sobbing wheezily, infallible indication that its rage was past, and glanced into the void below. Far down, he saw a dark misshapen lump bound from a jutting ledge—the last that any man would ever see of Meru.

Kioga's eyes came up, attracted by a moving train along a mountain trail far in the distance and coming toward him. They were as ants so far away; yet his keen eye made out a mighty host of men and brutes, undoubtedly the minions of Semya's city bound for the City of the Kings to put him on the throne by force.

Kioga mounted on the beast which had been Meru's and retraced his earlier steps to the bridge across the gorge. Its chains defied his strength. He hitched the ponderous mammoth to their rings and urged it forward.

Up on the winding trail above, the vanguard of the mounted warriors appeared, and glimpsing what he did, rushed down with threatening yells.

The second staple broke away. Kioga drove his beast across the bridge, now resting only by its weight upon the side he quitted. Chained to a timber of the bridge, Kioga's bull strained mightily, hauling it within the fraction of an inch of slipping off the other ledge. But there it somehow jammed.

The oncoming foreguard thundered out upon the bridge, two abreast, until the weight of four great mammoths tramped on the quivering structure. Turning to unhitch his beast before escaping, Kioga saw the bridge sag with the weight it bore, and shortened thus, slip from its distant seat.

Men's yells, and shrill wild trumpetings of mammoths mingled. The bridge sagged farther; unable to advance along its steep incline, the brutes slid backward until their combined weight was all at that weakened far end. One of the warriors sprang from mammoth-back to safety on the road above his head, before the bridge gave way completely, precipitating beasts and men to eternity.

Stunned by this severance of their artery of war, Semya's soldiery gathered opposite Kioga, the gorge and dangling bridge between. The Snow Hawk wheeled his brute and sent it on. From the other side a heavy war-spear hurtled, shod with meteoric iron. It struck Kioga's brute a glancing blow and clung, but did not pierce the mat of hair.

Kioga snatched it up and hurled it back, with better aim, to strike its owner squarely in the breast. Then, urging on his mount, he started down the trail, part of the enemy still remaining to be passed. There was not time to replace his earlier disguise which Ameeg the thief had contrived, and by which they would recognize and give him way. Yet he must attain the City of the Kings, to inform Mahri of the danger threatening in the mountains. He must also contrive that those ahead of him did not attain the city.

Encountering that earlier war-train, he joined them, offering their leader a fabricated message from the forces in their rear. "You are to wait for them upon the river-bank. All will approach the City of the Kings at once, with show of mighty force. A messenger will greet you at the gates, and give you further orders."

ADDING thus to uncertainty, Kioga hastened on. Arriving at the river, he beheld, amid its murky fogs, six of the broad flat river-boats with Semya's shields nailed at their peaks, waiting to bear the noble's men-at-arms.

Avoiding these, Kioga turned upriver, swam his mount across and paused before the city gates.

"I am from Semya's city," he announced. "I bring news of disaster to his army. Delay me at your peril, gate-men!"

This threatening response was well conceived; for cunning Semya could be counted on to post men friendly to his cause at such a strategic point. The gates swung in. Kioga passed through swiftly. He had not gone a hundred

paces when his name was called. He glimpsed a crooked form—the thief.

"Ameeg! Your face is pale! You tremble!"

"Not for myself—for you, my friend. Ten of Semya's men are seeking you, the pick of his best fighters. 'Tis well you have returned without your old disguise. They know you only as Akra the warrior, or you would have been slain before the gates. Dismount! Be not conspicuous."

IT was good counsel. Kioga obeyed, abandoning his mammoth and mingling with the crowds. "Wherefore such multitudes?" he inquired.

"It is the coronation day," Ameeg replied. "Tokala is to be crowned within an hour, if the spies of Semya do not kill him first."

"Your men?" the Snow Hawk questioned hastily.

"I have but twenty faithful left. Of one of them I am not sure. Semya's wealth has bought the rest, and more than half the nobles too. All is lost—we'll be dead men, my friend!" wailed Ameeg dismally.

"Not yet! Bear up, good thief! Do not forget that Mahri is our strong ally, commanding many men." The Snow Hawk thought swiftly. "Come with your men into the hall of state, well armed."

"Beware of Semya," muttered Ameeg swiftly. "One of Loalli's chamber-slaves told him that you were the slave who saved her from the mammoth and later marked his face forever with its scar. He will remember you. Beware!"

"This for black-hearted Semya," Kioga answered, slapping Ameeg's knife-blade sharply. The thief grinned fiercely.

"'Twill be a pleasure. Tell me when."

"Place yourself near him. At the first sign of treachery, strike hard and true! I go to Mahri. Luck to you, friend!"

"And to you also," murmured Ameeg as Kioga quitted his side.

The coronation march had begun; hastily Kioga neared the hall of state. Its doors had all been taken down to open the great hall for these historic ceremonies. Crowds milled before the portals and densely lined the street down which the royal procession presently would come.

Within, the foremost nobles, attended by their slaves and glittering in rich white robes of royalty, sat on the ornate chairs which flanked the central golden throne.



Semya was there. He gnawed his lips. His face was pale, with pearls of sweat upon the brow. Well Kioga knew the turmoil that was in him. With all plans made to foil the nomination of Tokala, the force which he had counted on was not available, since the soldiery from his home city had not yet arrived. Another hour or two would see Tokala king, with power to destroy him at a whim. The other conspiring nobles shared in his frustration.

MAHRI'S seat was vacant, as was Loalli's. Kioga met Mahri entering the hall of state to take his seat, and stepped before the noble to tell him of events upon the highroads out beyond the city. As if he saw a ghost, Mahri checked. Kioga noted it, but spoke out quickly, that no time might be lost.

"Semya's warriors will soon be at the gates. He knows that I am in your service and faithful to the king-to-be, Tokala. Be warned and ready for whatever comes. See that the boy is guarded watchfully. I shall be near if worst should come to worst."

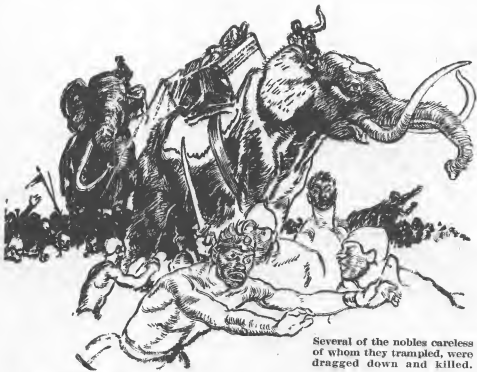
Mahri's lips were white. "So thou art Akra, slave at first and false warrior in the second place! Now I remember thee, who stepped between Loalli and her bull, and later bore my gifts to her, to bring no answer back. I did not know thee in that other ugly mask."

"This is no time to talk of gifts and maidens," said Kioga sharply, without the deference which Mahri would demand. "Semya's men, I tell you, will undo your making of a king if it is possible. I have delayed their army on the road, eluding the assassins Semya put upon my trail. But the army may find another route and so undo my work."

"Thy tone is sharp—nay, insolent," complained Mahri through lips that trembled strangely. "I like it not. I say, I like it not!" His voice rose to a note almost hysterical. Kioga, startled by the change in him, cast quickly through his mind for some good reason for it. He had not far to search.

He knew that Mahri loved the noble Loalli. If it had come to his ears that she had scorned his gifts and spoken of love and power to one who seemed to be a slave in Mahri's own employ, the deep affront of such a thing would rankle like a mortal wound. That only could account for Mahri's sudden change of face.

Kioga was aware of deadly danger in this circumstance. But Mahri, outwardly controlling his emotions, swept on to occupy his place among the seated nobles.



Several of the nobles careless of whom they trampled, were dragged down and killed.

As he sat down, a slave from Semya's retinue bowed in obedience to an order and left the hall in seeming haste.

All eyes now turned upon the entry of Loalli. Never more strikingly beautiful, she slowly strode toward her seat, aware of Mahri's eager eyes devouring her, yet utterly indifferent.

Attempting to depart unseen by her, Kioga saw her stop and stand at sight of him, a glad expression on her face. He moved away again. She checked him. "Wait! They said you were in danger, wounded, killed—that Semya sought to murder you. . . . Why did you not come back to me?"

He cautioned her. "Do not delay. There is no time for explanations now. The horns blow for the entry of the little Ru. He is in peril, as are all of us. Do not dismiss your guards."

"I am a noble. You order me. Yet I obey, because—because I am a woman," said Loalli, with her eyes upon him softly. "Do you need warriors? My men would follow you—"

A sound of chanting drowned her words. Kioga waved her on. She went, head proudly high again, to her chair.

THE roll of rhythmic chanting rose to shake the ground. Kioga stood aside, to watch the slow unfolding of scenes as from the old Arabian Nights: Three score of finely muscled slaves strode into view, bound wrist to wrist and limb to

limb in chains of clinking gold. They were the symbol of the nation's servitude to its new king.

Behind them came as many golden-bodied girls, free maidens of the upper class, each likewise chosen for her beauty and magnificence of form and bearing. These symbolized the choice which any M'Anda king may have among the marriageable maidens of his realm. Each bore a snow-white pigeon in her hands, which, as she passed between the double rank of slaves, she cast aloft to circle in the great rotunda dome above.

Now came men of the upper class and lower nobility, in mammoth-leather suits of scarlet and bright orange. Upon each wrist a sable hawk was perched, blind-folded and bound by a leash of silver chain, and wearing silver bells about its ankles. These passed between the rows of slaves and maidens, standing then to either side, in token of submission by the rich to their new ruler.

Came next the royal soldiery, with *kuris* bared and flashing, marching to the alternating roll of drums, with bucklers and helmets agleam by torchlight. These paused before the open doors of the great hall, to act as protectors of the peace during the coming ceremonies, and hold the throngs in bounds.

Watchfully Kioga eyed these dispositions, taking note of everything transpiring. The face of Semya was now calm but pale. Mahri's was a study in

conflicting passions, his eyes ever and again upon Loalli, who sat unperturbed and cool between the other nobles, gently wielding a hawk's-wing fan.

The *rat-a-tat* of drums, and sound of chanting slaves increased, and mingled with them was the trumpet of approaching mammoths. Now splendor reached its brightest height. A train of beasts hove into view, albino mammoths of the royal stables. Their ears were hung with sparkling jewelry. Their thick white outer hair was twisted into looping scalloped braids, under which the inner wool lay curled and curried till it glistened. Their curving tusks were carved, blue ivory inlaid with threads of silver and of copper. Torchlit, they glowed as beasts of living gold, requiring no other ornament. Each with its trunk swung up and down a smoking ivory censer, whose heavy perfume hung along the streaked air. Their bare-skinned mahouts checked them just outside the portals, and ranged them in an open row.

Between them now came one afoot whom Kioga knew, in stunning vestments of the royal house. Flashpan bore himself with comic majesty, though tripping now and then upon his overrobe of saffron-colored mammoth wool. He carried a shield of yellow metal, inscribed with the heraldic coat-of-arms of the M'Anda ruling house. This would be handed to the king on his accession, in lieu of head-crown, according to an ancient M'Anda usage.

IN his other hand Flashpan held a chain which led back to a pink-eyed mammoth-calf, also albino, its silk-like hair dressed and decorated with all the artistry of the royal M'Anda grooms. Cross-legged on this lesser mammoth sat the king-to-be, Tokala, his message-hawk before him on the richly polished leather saddle. The beast he rode would be his own for life, to grow with him and bear him through his realms. His robe was made of iridescent overlying feathers, open at the breast to show the flashing golden plaque of office.

Behind him, one to either side, strode Munro and I, who had been with Tokala on his entry to the kingdom, and so were rated worthy of the honor of escorting him.

At glimpse of him, the multitude sent up the roar of their approval, breaking through the restraining cordon of warriors, to surge about Tokala, eager to behold the person of their young ruler.

Foremost among the crowd, and blanking out the others from our notice, stood one the rumors of whose fate were settled now forever: Kioga stood there, by his living presence raising from our minds all fear that he was dead!

Tokala, with a yell of gladness, would have leaped down from his perch, but for the Snow Hawk's voice close by. "Remember, you are a king," Kioga said in English, comprehensible to ourselves alone. "Act like a king." Tokala heard, and obeyed—composed again, although joy and excitement surged in him.

KIOGA turned to us who rushed to greet him, lost for words to show our joy that he was still alive. I cannot express what fresh and reassuring confidence surged up in me to know that he was still with us, working for a reunion with our friends which we all craved, despite the pagan mummery we acted out to save our skins. He did not leave us time to talk.

"Go through with this," he told us, shouting to be heard above the roaring press on every side. "Watch out for Semya. Keep Tokala closely covered. Once he is actually king, it will be too late for them to harm him. Loalli is on our side. But all the rest are hostile. I shall be near, in case—" He sought to tell us more, but now the soldiery had controlled the mob again. With it, he was hurled back. The march moved on. Tokala, with ourselves as escort, neared the empty throne, dismounting just before it. The nobles rose to honor him.

A warrior clove the slender chain in half with one blow of his *kuri*. Tokala mounted and sat in the empty place. Flashpan stood waiting, with the shield of kingship.

His action was the signal for a sudden silence. A heavy gong rang deeply with a brassy tone. The men of wealth and low nobility unbound their hawks, drew back their leathern hoods. Then at a signal all the hawks were freed, to rise with beating pinions high above the swarm of milk-white pigeons.

Swift then were the vicious blows with which the killer-birds struck and struck again. All the silent court was filled with sound of jingling bells, as the sharp-beaked hawks struck down the fluttering pigeons.

When every hawk had borne its victim down and covered it upon the stones, the owners came to gather in their taloned hunters, retiring to their several places.

A cry went up:

"Thus may the little Ru strike down his enemies!"

This ceremony ended, Loalli rose, received the royal shield from Flashpan's hands and presented it to Tokala with the ritual words: "O Ru, long absent, now returned, the ninety-seventh of thy line, long may this shield defend thee whom we shall acknowledge by our hails as king. May thy rule endure for many decades! May the maidens of thy choice one day give thee many sons to carry on thy line. May thy mammoth herds be multiplied. I give thee homage. Hail!"

Her voice rang clearly in the silent hall of state, and that of Mahri and of several others followed promptly, until only Semya was unheard from. His voice alone was now required to make Tokala king, unanimously.

Tall Semya's glance leaped through the crowded hall, as if in search of some one. His brow dripped sweat. There came a rumble of condemnation at his delay; for Mahri had well established his puppet's popularity, and the people hungered for a ruler of the old king-line.

Uninformed of their delay, and hourly expectant of the arrival of his warrior-force from the mountains by which to execute a *coup*, Semya did not dare delay his answer longer. The word came out of him reluctantly. Yet it was clearly heard, the one word "*Hail*" which made Tokala king.

A MOMENT'S deep hush ensued, before the storm of accolade which would follow. Then suddenly a cry rose somewhere amid the throng: "*Slaves of M'Anda, rise and strike! The outer world is reached! We shall be free, to spread our tribes upon the outer earth!*"

In the ears of all who heard, the news seared like a white-hot flame. Here for the hermit race of M'Anda were the tidings for which they and countless generations of their ancestors had been laboring down the centuries.

For slaves, here was new freedom. For royalty, new fields for power and conquest.

And for ourselves, the prisoners within a captive kingdom, here was escape back to the world and friends we knew, release from this strange mummery to which we lent ourselves perforce.

Kioga, his eyes not upon the ceremonies but on that slave of Semya whose shouted rumor had been intended to disrupt the ceremonies, lashed swiftly out

to fell the shouter in his tracks. But now the winds were loosed. The nobles, ever fearful of just such consequences of their cruel misrule, were frozen momentarily. All save tall Semya and Loalli.

The wolf-faced noble leaped with *kuri* drawn, to skewer Mahri's new-made king, probably intending later to justify his act by proving that Tokala was not of the royal blood, of which his spies had only recently informed him.

Tokala raised his shield to fend the blow. But Loalli was yet quicker. Her slim hand moved as the lightning strikes. There was the flash of metal as she drove her dagger home, and Semya wheeled, with blood afroth upon his twisting lips, to cut her down.

HARDLY had Loalli endangered herself by striking to save her youthful king, when from behind there sprang the figure of Ameeg the thief, supported by his score of nimble-fingered and well-armed rascals. Ameeg swung swiftly upward with a long and heavy blade he carried. The noble's *kuri* shivered on the stouter weapon, and then Ameeg sprang wolflike at his throat, snatched out the metal Loalli had planted in the noble's breast and plunged it back repeatedly till Semya stirred no longer.

And now suddenly, out of the milling press, Kioga appeared, to join Ameeg and throw a ring of armament about Tokala, the boy-king. Things moved with speed when guided by his judgment. Kioga's voice rose up above the din. "The king! Protect your king!"

Among the throng were some not yet insensible to loyalty. Of these a number rallied to us, making a clear way out of the desecrated hall of state. We caught a glimpse of Loalli, separated from us by a milling mob, moving rearward to another exit, well guarded by her warriors and slaves, most of whom were loyal to her kindness.

Of Mahri I saw nothing. I never dreamed—but of Mahri more in its place.

Kioga had thrown his robe about Tokala, to hide the royal vestments from too-covetous eyes. Now, on account of violence and rioting, we were the safer for being afoot and inconspicuous. Several of the lesser nobles favorable to Semya had taken to their mammoths, seeking to ride through the press of humanity in the streets, careless of whom they trampled in their rush for sanctuary. A roar of fury followed them, and some were dragged down from their



The wolf-faced noble leaped to skewer the new-made king. Tokala raised his shield to fend the blow; but Loalli was yet quicker.

mounts and killed by infuriated relatives of those they had trampled.

The royal soldiery, disorganized by rumors of a contact with an outer world, were derelict to duty, as mercenaries anywhere are wont to be in times of crisis. They had disbanded, scattering to rejoin each other when they chanced to meet, but offering no serious threat to the menace of the mob.

LED by Ameeg, to whom the byways of the city were familiar as its runways to a fox, we found a safe retreat at last in an old abandoned subterranean slave-keep near the great outdoor arena. And it was here, by special courier—a thief in Ameeg's service—that we learned the irony of these events, and the depths to which the treacherous Semya had sunk: Reports of contact with the outside world were false and baseless. Semya had created them out of whole cloth, in order to prevent another from becoming king; but his slave had bungled matters, delaying his outcry until too late. "You speak with certain knowledge?" demanded Kioga of the messenger.

"I have just spoken to Tali, the overseer, fresh from the workings in the tun-

nel to see a new king made. He left his slaves laboring to brace the ceiling of the tunnel, which threatens to collapse near its far end."

Here was information which we must believe, since Tali of all men was best qualified to speak on tunneling. It was a moment dark with disappointment for each one of us.

And still from afar the roaring of the tempest which the rumor had unloosed mounted steadily in volume.

To take stock of the altered situation, Kioga left us, going out into the City of the Kings.

With *kuri* loosened in its scabbard, the Snow Hawk strode the troubled streets, and turned toward the wall, where by this time, there should be some sign of the warrior forces approaching from the hills. He felt that since the mass of them did not know what end they were to serve, he might divert them to join with Mahri and Loalli in a strong alliance to support the new boy-king, and subdue the growing uproar.

He neared the city gates, one point still held by the old authorities, and suddenly glimpsed Mahri being admitted to the challenge platform, from which pa-



laver may be held with friends or foes beyond.

Kioga thought to hail the prince, but had one fair look at the noble's face. Mahri's features were lined and pallid, the eyes deep-sunken, feverishly ablaze as if an inner fire were consuming him.

Warned in time, Kioga let him pass unspoken, and mounted atop the wall to where he could command view of the challenge platform on which the other was emerging. Below, Kioga also glimpsed the warriors and beasts arriving after long delay before the city gates. He heard them call identities, demand admission. Mahri answered in a deep yet penetrating voice:

"He whom you came to serve is dead. A new king has been made, who has no drop of royal blood in his veins. I am not rich, as was Semya; but if you help me overthrow this false impostor, each man shall be a leader in my realm, and there shall be no kings hereafter. Refuse, and it is death to all of us!"

ALL that Mahri had wrought, he now sought to destroy; the young boy-king, the ruling class, and all established government must fall if he succeeded.

Here was a rouser of rabble incarnated, faithful to no friend or party, the archetype of nihilist, who would throw down all things to serve his private ends—of jealousy and love of power.

Near to the Snow Hawk's hand, arranged one on another in wooden racks, were numbers of the sickle-bladed *molas* he had seen upon the forges of the arm-smiths, razor-sharp except at one short gripping-place. Kioga took one up and poised it, eyes upon Mahri's shoulders just behind the neck. From up above, at such close range, a well-directed throw might easily behead the faithless noble in his tracks; and the realm would be well rid of such a traitor. Back went Kioga's hand, the *mola* glittering brightly. The muscle on his shoulder twitched. But suddenly he paused, assailed by doubts about his right to kill.

After all, he had dined at this noble's board, and served him well while they were friends. Kioga put the *mola* back, unable to bring himself to strike thus, thug-like, from behind. . . . He would regret his failure to destroy this Mahri before the day was old!

Kioga heard the leader of the forces shout back his acceptance of Mahri's terms, and heard the noble call: "Throw wide the gates!" Came then the rumble of a lifting bar, as a warrior inside leaped to obey. There was a louder clang as the long broad bar dropped back. The warrior fell, speared from behind. The slaves, in roving through the city, had reached the gates at last.

Mahri, aware of something going wrong, vanished from the outside platform, reappearing yelling frantically for the soldiery to put their beasts against the gates and force them in. But already the slaves, as if led by one versed in the arts of war, had braced the gates with timbers to withstand assault of any kind.

Balked in attempts to rush, the soldiery outside ranged their tall beasts up close to the wall, then from their large equipment broke out crude flexible ladders, made of mammoth leather, and wooden scaling devices. Swift though they worked, they were outwitted by an active figure on the wall above, who when the hooks upon their ropes took hold, immediately cut the strands; and when their ladders were upraised, pushed one after another backward, laden with climbers who sprawled in howling confusion on the slope before the city wall.

Kioga could not long hold the top against the multitude beyond. But aid came swiftly in the form of one he knew and well remembered—one who had first befriended him and taught him how to drive a mammoth.

"Tahro!" cried the Snow Hawk, and the other met him with a hard quick grip of friendship. As he came, a stream of slaves appeared to man the wall.

"My men," said Tahro swiftly in explanation.

"You lead the rising slaves to liberty?"

"Or death, I know not which," Tahro replied. "But we shall at least die fighting to become free men. Ah, see them go to battle!"

IT was a scene Kioga found worth watching. The attacking soldiery, now better organized, had planted broader ladders at the walls securely and stormed with valor suited to a better cause. They came up two by two in twenty places, presenting helmets and breast-of-metal to blows the slaves rained on them with the arms kept on the parapets for such emergencies. The wall was as a ship between two waves—the one of naked slaves arriving from within, the other of the

storming soldiery—which met and crested in a whirl of fiercely fighting men.

The soldiers were outnumbered, but more suitably equipped. Their heavy swords sheared naked slaves almost in twain. Their armor turned the hardest blows; but its weight encumbered them, whereas the slaves, light on their feet as cats, could leap and circle nimbly, waiting for the chance to run their *kuris* deep into any vital unprotected spot.

Now back, now forward surged the battle on the wall. Swift as the flight of hawks, glittering *molas* whirled through air; and where they struck, no helmet or armor could withstand their force and deadly keenness. Fast as the soldiers mounted, even faster came fresh levies of slaves to take the places of their fallen comrades and force the fighting until the last attacker fell.

KIOGA struck no blow save occasionally in his own defense. His life was necessary to another cause than this contention of the slaves and former masters. When he departed from the scene the slaves had dominated, throwing wide the gates at last to admit the weakened enemy, laying hold of them as they came in, diminished by the number of fallen stormers, and slaughtering them without compunction.

The whirlwind now was in its fullest power. Turmoil, pandemonium, reigned within the city walls. The city was like some giant anthill overturned, as from every dungeon, liberated slaves poured forth, a wild and pitiless horde unleashed upon the ruling classes. It now was generally known that rumors of a contact with the outside world were nothing more than rumors. Yet though the slaves had struck prematurely, their gains were great; already they held half the city. Many of the nobles had retreated to their cliff-side houses, easily convertible to fortresses, and here were in a state of siege, surrounded by their faithful.

Near the open theater arena, where the carnivals were to have been held, the former rulers still held out and partly dominated; for it was near here that Mahri's fighters had assembled and rallied, joining with the men-at-arms of other nobles.

Much of this Kioga saw or learned when presently he rejoined Ameeg and the rest of us who anxiously waited his safe return. We learned of Mahri's treachery with sheer dismay, for on his forces we had counted to the last. Now he too

was an enemy, the bitterer for the personal motives that drove him.

Yells from without foretold fresh misfortune. One of Ameeg's thieves burst in to give us warning. "Mahri and his warriors seek the new boy-king! Hide him away before they come!"

Kioga bounded to his feet at that and turned to Ameeg.

"You, Ameeg," he said, "know some distant exit from the dungeons underground. Lead on. You—Munro, Flashpan, Kirk, Tokala—follow Ameeg. Quick, now!"

Five of Ameeg's men accompanied us as their leader picked a way through these tortuous mazes which rival the famed Parisian sewers in complexity. Men have been lost for weeks in these blind passages, and we saw skeletons to prove that others had been lost forever there. Undoubtedly these died from lack of water. But Ameeg knew the passages as the old Romans knew their own deep catacombs, and led the way toward safety without a slip or one false turn.

With the remainder of Ameeg's men, Kioga waited to defend our rear, or to throw Mahri off the scent, as necessity dictated. How readily and confidently men did his bidding, I thought as we left him; they were caught up and drawn to him as by some strong magnetic power.

Mahri himself was one of those who came in search of us. He found his entry disputed by Kioga and a dozen resolute thieves, each one of them skilled in the art of thrust and parry. It was with some astonishment that they beheld Mahri accompanied only by a small military bodyguard.

"WE wait to serve you," said Kioga coldly, as they neared.

"With *kuris* or in friendship?" observed the noble softly, as with hurt feelings.

"Whichever you prefer," Kioga answered. "Your friendship, like your dagger, has two edges."

"Your men outnumber mine," said Mahri, speaking swiftly. "I come to seek your aid, not to do injury."

"Out with it, then! What aid is it you want of us?"

Mahri made great show of frankness. "Things go not well with us. The slaves are almost in control; the noble class is doomed, its warriors scattered. Out of the strife will come another government. Join with us to support the new boy-king."

"That from you—who not two hours since called on Semya's minions to enter

and destroy him as an impostor!" Kioga answered with ironic reproach.

Mahri bore his thrust with equanimity. "You overheard me speak? 'Tis true. I frankly do admit it. But I was overwrought by the uprising. My words were not my own, and I repent. Call on me for the proof of this repentance."

"It rings deceitfully," Kioga answered. "But put down all your arms in proof," he added, distrustful more than ever, but well aware that Mahri's strength of warriors might still be advantageous to us all.

THE noble and his men obeyed unhesitatingly, whereupon Kioga and his men came forth for parley. The noble's gaze passed over them. He talked at length of plans and purposes—at too great length, Kioga thought. "Art vague," he answered brusquely, at last. "Get to the point, and quickly."

"The point is reached," said Mahri with an undertone of triumph which Kioga caught at once. "You are all my prisoners."

"Prisoners!" one of the thieves replied, with derisive laughter on his lips. But suddenly his laughter died, stopped by a flying *mola* that struck him from behind. Two others of Kioga's men dropped where they stood. The Snow Hawk took one glance behind and knew the worst.

One of Ameeg's own men must have betrayed this hiding-place to Mahri, for from behind, out of the very exit Kioga and his men had used, a file of Mahri's warriors came, armed to the teeth.

Mahri smiled sinisterly. His voice was soft with purring triumph as he gave orders to his men. "Seize that one," pointing at Kioga. "Kill the rest."

The grim work done before his eyes cold-bloodedly, Mahri's laughter bubbled in his throat. "For you,"—to the Snow Hawk,—"I have a better entertainment waiting. I would Loalli could be here to see thee dance." He made a sign.

All entered where so recently the new boy-king had hidden, and by dark passages came toward the open-air arena, catching as they did the reek of wild beasts from the forests of the realm, whose snarls and growls reëchoed in the lantern-lit darkness. "They bid thee welcome," said Mahri to Kioga, meaningly.

A patch of light appeared beyond. A full moon lit the great arena brightly, showing its oval enclosure, high polished walls surrounding it on every side and

rising twenty feet. Beyond were tiers of empty seats.

"Shalt run before a silent gallery," muttered Mahri, and to his men, "Throw him in!"

"A moment," said the Snow Hawk. "Give me some arm to make a fight of it. 'Twill make it better worth your watching."

"I came to see thee flee and scream for mercy, not to see thee fight," was Mahri's contemptuous answer, and to his warriors. "Down with him! Why do you wait?"

The warriors obeyed, but before he fell Kioga seized a lance and *kuri* from the nearest, hurling it below. A moment later he found himself upon the earth within the wall, with Mahri and his men looking down on him. Worked by a chain manipulated from the wall, one of twenty traps was slowly rising. Behind, gaunt with starvation and long confinement, a shadow rose upon hind legs. Kioga knew it for a pit-bear from the hills, chosen for its savage disposition and formidable armory of claws and curving teeth, more deadly than a tiger.

The pit-bear dropped down to all fours and came out with a raging impetus, straight at the crouched and muscular figure waiting to defend himself.

A MEEG had taken leave of us to search for food in places known to him. Munro and I sought rest and sleep, weary from this day's activities. One of the thieves among our company stood guard, though we were in little danger of discovery.

Tokala, not yet king for a day, alone was wakeful. It had been through these very mazes that Jemmu the city urchin had lately led him, to view the penned-up beasts and slaves. Kioga was somewhere behind, perhaps in danger. Round about him were the snores of weary men. The single sentry nodded, taking frequent swigs of *lohe* from his ivory flask.

Tokala turned, sat up. The sentry took no notice. Tokala gained his feet. The man was breathing heavily, thanks to the mildly potent drink. Tokala passed behind, paused to pick up a lantern, then quietly slipped away as he had come, skirting the skeletons with averted eyes.

He heard a sudden multiplying uproar of the beasts, followed by mocking laughter and a voice which sounded much like that of Mahri, whom he had always known as a friend, which cried, "Well dodged! Now, at him, beast!"

Tokala bounded forward, glimpsing through a barred opening the sight of man and animal contending in the arena, with Mahri and his warriors applauding from the wall. The bear made short and vicious rushes, finding at each charge the keen blade of a lance which pricked him on the head and shoulders. Then suddenly Tokala's blood ran cold, for he who faced the animal was Kioga.

Again the pit-bear charged; and Tokala turned in frantic haste—not to desert his friend, but to summon help.

WITHIN the dungeon chambers Tokala ran on flying feet. Somewhere near were allies, could he but find them and enlist their aid. He cried out loudly: "Slaves! Slaves whom I fed when you were starving! Reply to me!"

"This way! This way!" a deep voice answered.

Stumbling, Tokala found a door, on which someone was pounding. He raised its outside bar. The door swung in. The faces of the slaves, no longer emaciated from starvation, were unfamiliar. But he was known to every man of them—the little Ru, who had not been too proud to visit them and now had come to keep his second promise, that of freedom.

A roar of acclamation rose. The slaves, destined to be nobles' sport, saluted him. In leaping words he told of what transpired in the near arena.

A burly hearty ruffian tossed Tokala on one shoulder and led the rush up toward the wall which skirted the arena.

Other ears had heard Tokala's cry. Flashpan, Munro and myself, alarmed by his discovered absence, had traced him, and encountered those whom he had summoned to his aid. We joined them, bursting out upon the wall a little distance from where Mahri and his companions were engrossed in baiting another living human being.

The slaves just liberated by Tokala crept stealthily upon the other party under cover of the wall. I know not what Munro or Flashpan did. But speaking for myself, I was transfixed. I never shall forget the dreadful terror which I felt, beholding our stanch friend in his extremity. The bear indeed he had killed; but Mahri had ordered loosed against him four of the great dire wolves. His back against the wall, Kioga was fending them off, but even the tireless Snow Hawk was gasping in exhaustion; and the four fearsome beasts pressed ever closer.

And then I saw that even in this extremity he had kept his wits about him, for he was edging along the wall toward the door of the wolves' own den. And now he made a furious berserk sally before which the wolves gave ground. Then whirling like a flash, Kioga leaped into their den. The trap fell heavily behind him. Like hammer blows against the wood he heard the hard impacts of the baffled beasts as they were stopped short by the heavy bars.

Again, from up above, the cry of Mahri rose imperiously. Then terror, fury and surprise were in it also. Kioga caught the sound of shouts, the impact as of bodies falling in the arena, and cruel laughter from the wall.

He looked out through a ventilating hole, to witness Mahri rising to his feet, his face a waxen mask of horror. A cry of dread was in his throat, yet passed his clenching teeth in but a whisper. His own fierce harriers, baffled by the sudden disappearance of the other prey, knew nothing of discrimination—and shrieking Mahri was their victim. He went down threshing like a stricken animal. His heels beat a hard tattoo against the trap which hid Kioga.

A fellow-man was being rent and torn beyond Kioga's sanctuary, one who had sought his life with an unparalleled ferocity. By every tenet of right or justified revenge, Kioga should have stayed his hand. Instead, assailed by pity, he raised the trap a foot and seized the stricken Mahri by the ankle, intending to haul him from the jaws of the wolves.

But suddenly the Snow Hawk's grasp was broken by a fierce tug from beyond. The snore of snarling tight-locked jaws told him that he was too late.

We who beheld the grim finale from above turned sick from the spectacle. Not so the slaves, who loosed the other captive beasts to join the dire wolves.

But though we turned away, sounds followed us—men's voices being choked off, the crunch of cracking bones.

THE Snow Hawk emerged from the dens to join us on the wall that overlooked the arena. Hardly had he greeted us when yet another company of slaves, leading nobles in their clutches, arrived upon the opposite edge of the arena and threw their victims to the beasts.

Such was the indication of the general temper. Tokala, representing nobility

at its highest, was now endangered too. The time had come to make our bid for liberty. The route toward it led through the City of the Kings toward the tunnel in the mountain.

UPON the tide of slaves ebbing and flowing in the streets, we could contrive best by seeming also to be slaves; to achieve that end, we put off outer apparel obtained from Mahri's wardrobe, and wrapped ourselves in ragged cloaks.

With Ameeg and his men for company, we set forth through the troubled city, riding on three mammoth laboring-bulls which were provided by Tahro. Thus, masquerading as toilers bound for labor in the tunnel, we slowly neared the opening. Scenes on the route informed us what we might expect were we recognized as attendants of Tokala, who still was king, though fleeing his domains.

With the scaling ladders originally used by the soldiery in attempting to force the wall, and others improvised upon the spot, the slaves were now engaged in bitter warfare against their former masters, who had taken refuge in their sumptuous cliff mansions, defending them with desperation from the former slaves who, climbing by ladder and agility, sought to oust them to the clutches of the mob.

Some of these lesser strongholds already had fallen. Slaves paraded from them in the finery seized at the time of victory, or fought about division of the spoils. Others looted in the households of freemen. Smoke and fire told of uncontrolled incendiaries at work.

A wild shout rose upon one side of us. A band of scaling slaves had just gained ingress to a noble's dwelling from a neighboring house. The defenders made their stand upon the topmost balcony. In full view of the cheering throngs upon the streets, the naked ravagers attacked, hurling their unlucky victims to the stones a hundred feet below. There was the crash and roar of destruction within the cliff-side mansion. Then some one hurled a torch, and smoke began to curl from every orifice.

Pillage, terror and destruction, held the beautiful City of the Kings in thrall.

I could but wonder: Where was the lovely noble Loalli now? How many of the other nobles would survive this holocaust? I did not realize as yet, the deep astuteness of that high-born princess.

Still more desperate hazards lie ahead for Kioga. Don't miss the great climax of this epic series of novels, in the next—the August issue.

Killer's End

By WILLIAM P. LAWSON

I WAS cutting firewood in back of Water Cañon station one morning when Buck Pettis emerged from the house and walked slowly over. Buck was the ranger to whom I had been attached some three weeks before, on my arrival in Arizona, to learn the duties of a Forest Service field man.

"The Super," Buck said, "jest called up on the phone. Says Clay Ellis has been pesterin' him about his homestead claim. Wants we should ride over and make a survey and report on it today."

Buck seemed disturbed, and I wondered why. I had heard of Ellis, reputedly a "plumb bad hombre" and suspected of more than one unavenged killing; but I could not see why that should cause Buck any present worry.

"I'd ought to scale some logs over to the sawmill this morning," Buck went on. "Reckon you could make a metes-and-bounds survey and draw up a report on the Ellis claim by yourself?"

"Don't see why not," I replied.

My companion seemed distinctly relieved. He got out instruments, helped me pack them on my horse, and sped me cheerfully on my way.

The quarter-section in question lay in a draw some ten miles south east of Water Cañon. I followed a Forest Service trail that led up and over an intervening ridge which culminated farther south in Ware Peak, where the fire tower for this part of the Apache was situated.

When I reached the claim, I found that it lay on a gentle slope, heavily timbered except for a cleared acre or two on which stood a log cabin. A spring gushed from a rock ledge near by and made a little stream that trickled down the draw. A pleasant spot. But not a homestead possibility, for Forest Service policy held that such claims, to pass muster, must be more valuable for agriculture than for timber.

Smoke rose from the chimney of the cabin. I pulled up before the door, which opened as I did so. A big man of forty or thereabouts stood on the threshold, peering at me with a scowl, holding a carbine in the crook of his arm.

I lost no time in introducing myself and stating my errand, ending with the request that the man, whom I assumed to be Ellis, would show me the nearest section corner if he knew where it was.

"Git down," he said in a grating voice, "I'll show you the cornder soon as I git my boots on."

He wore patched overalls and a grimy shirt. His face was swarthy, with aquiline features and high cheek bones. Matted black hair fell over his eyes and down to his shoulders in back. I stared fascinated as he sat on the doorsill and pulled on down-at-the-heel boots, wondering vaguely whether the soil that caked his person had been gathered externally or was working outward from some earthy core within.

"What's wrong with Buck that he didn't come?" the homesteader demanded, as he rose and stamped one foot and the other.

I had an idea by this time what ailed Buck, but I merely explained that the ranger had other and pressing business, to which Ellis replied nothing. He strode off to the section corner in silence; nor did he speak while I ran out the line of the hundred-and-sixty acre tract he sought title to.

But when I was through and preparing to leave, he asked abruptly:

"You aimin' to git the claim for me?"

"It isn't altogether up to me. I make a preliminary report—"

Ellis broke in impatiently:

"I know all about that. It's what you figure on putting in your report I'm asking about. The Super claims that has right smart to do with my getting title."

I nodded, thinking quickly.

"I'm asking what you're fixin' to do, feller!" my interlocutor demanded. The menace in his voice was unmistakable. He had shifted the muzzle of the carbine till it pointed toward me.

"You can't run that bluff, Mr. Ellis," I said. "I'll do what I think is right."

REAL EX-

LIFE'S high moments of adventure are described in these true stories contributed by our readers. (For details of our Real Experience contest, see Page 3.) First a Forest Service man tells of a tough citizen with whom he had to deal—and of an Indian who took over the job in his own peculiar fashion.

"I'm not bluffing; by God!" he asserted.

Appraising him,—somewhat less calmly than I pretended,—I was prepared to admit that he was sincere in this claim. It occurred to me that the situation was one needing the practise of diplomacy.

"You can kill me," I said slowly; "any half-wit with a gun could do that. But it won't get you the homestead, and that's what you're after, isn't it?"

"Are you sayin' you'll get it for me?"

I shook my head. "Not promising. But while I'm alive, you've got a chance; otherwise none at all. Why don't you wait till you hear the result of your application? If the news doesn't suit you—well, I'll still be here."

For a long minute the squatter stared, turning the point over in his mind. Then, evidently deciding that I was saving face and would do what he wished, he nodded shortly and lowered the gun-muzzle.

"I'll wait. And if you know what's good for you, you'll see I get the claim. Savvy?"

I said I savvied, repacked my instruments, and took the homeward trail.

DURING the ride I had plenty of time to think over the jam I had got into, thanks to Buck's astute manipulation of events; for it was plain now why the ranger had wished the job onto me.

I wondered if it might not be wise to ride in to town and acquaint the Supervisor what had transpired, but upon arriving at the station, I found him there in conference with Buck, who looked sullen and ill-at-ease.

They were leaning on the corral gate when I rode up, the Super's saddled horse standing near by.

He seemed glad to see me.

"How'd you make out?" he asked.

I told him, and he frowned.

"Lucky you got out with a whole skin. I've just been jumping Buck for sending you over there alone."



"He don't have to live here reg'lar," muttered Buck. "You got to stand in with fellers like Ellis. I wouldn't put it past him to sneak up here and drill somebody if he got on the prod—or set a woods fire."

The Super stared disgustedly.

"You're a hell of a ranger—afraid of a little lead."

"I aint afraid," insisted Buck doggedly; "it's just that I figure my health's worth more than a jag of Gov'ment land. I've seen too many fellers out here get kilt over nothin' much."

The Super said nothing for a moment. He got Buck's point; it was clear. Men in the Southwest at that time didn't reach a green old age by hunting trouble with admitted killers.

Suddenly the Super turned to me.

"I've been thinking I'd like to use Jim Hoyt—who's at the fire-tower—in town for a spell. Like to go over with me now—stay there while he's gone?"

The suggestion surprised me, but I nodded assent.

"If Buck will lend me a horse to pack my bed and duffel-bag over on."

"Shore," said the ranger promptly; "take ary one of my critters you want."

The trail the boss and I took was the same I'd used that morning, as far as the shoulder of Ware Peak, where we turned south up the ridge. We rode slowly, in a walk most of the way, through thick stands of pine and spruce timber. Suddenly he swung sideways in his seat and turned, motioning to me to come closer.

"Ellis," said the Super without preamble, "won't make any move till he hears from his application. By then I'll have something figured out, so you won't get in trouble. In the meantime you can stay on with Hoyt at the lookout camp. It'll be a good chance to learn that kind of work."

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"But I thought you wanted Hoyt in town?" I said.

"That was just talk. What I wanted was to get you away from Water Cañon. Buck wouldn't do anything but worry as long as you were there—afraid Clay might call."

He broke off, gazing ahead at the trail which for a mile or so had been winding up the ridge. As we reached the top, I saw the fire-tower ahead, and at its base the log cabin where the look-out lived.

A dog's bark sounded sharp on the frosty air.

"That's Hoyt's dog Hector," the Super vouchsafed; "both of 'em right good folks."

We entered a clearing of an acre or so of fairly level ground, with the tower and cabin in the center. Walking toward us was a slender, sinewy boy of about my own age. A large dog trotted at his heels.

"Got a new recruit for you, Jim," said the boss as we rode up.

He introduced me, explaining the situation briefly. Hoyt shook hands, grinning. His gaze was candid and direct. I felt at once that we would get along.

ON the morning following my arrival Hoyt proposed a ride.

"There's a spot we can't see from the tower," he explained, "over the ridge yonder—the Cañon of Las Animas, it's called. So we keep a fire-guard there on the rim, with a telephone connection so he can call here if a fire starts. I like to drop in on this guard every once in so often. Mind?"

I professed myself pleased with the plan, and we started off after breakfast. On the way Hoyt asked casually:

"You like snakes—rattlers?"

I stared. "I can do without them. Why?"

Hoyt smiled faintly. "Nothing, only Encarnacion—the fire-guard—may have one or two around. He makes pets of them."

"But—what's wrong with Encarnacion?"

My companion grinned. "He's a Hopi. One of the tribe that uses snakes in their dances. He claims they act right friendly if you treat them right. But what I was getting at, you better not start a fracas with one of Encarnacion's *compadres* if you happen on it. He wouldn't take it kindly."

Shortly afterward we swung past the face of a steep cliff and came to a ledge overlooking a deep gorge.

"There's Las Animas Cañon," Hoyt said, indicating the gorge, "and yonder's Encarnacion!"

I glanced ahead and saw an Indian boy of eighteen or so stretched full length on a rock in the sun, gazing out over the timbered slopes before him.

Lying there motionless, he seemed part of his surroundings; as if, indeed, he and all natural things—rocks, trees, running water and the creatures of the woods—were animated by a common soul.

As our horses' hoofs sounded, the boy glanced around, then rose with a single graceful movement, his black eyes fixed on us unwinkingly.

"Howdy, Encarnacion!" Hoyt said. "This is the new señor, who is staying at the look-out camp with me."

The boy's gaze shifted, but he made no comment.

"No fires, I reckon?" asked Hoyt.

A shake of the head answered him.

"Clay Ellis up to anything new?"

It was as if the words touched a spring. Instantly the Indian's impassive features twisted in a scowl, and a stream of Spanish words fell from his lips.

Hoyt turned to me, frowning.

"Don't know as the boss told you, but he left word for Encarnacion to keep an eye on Ellis. And Ellis came up this way last night. The trail here branches off and leads down to his claim. You can see it to the left there—way below."

I followed his pointing finger and made out the homesteader's cabin, visible in a pocket of the foothills to eastward.

I glanced at Encarnacion once more.

"What's the boy so worked up about?" I inquired.

"Seems Ellis stopped at the ledge,"

Hoyt returned, "and one of those snakes I was telling you about appeared, and Clay shot its head off. That's one reason, I reckon, we haven't seen any reptiles sunning themselves today."

HE spoke to the boy again, in Spanish, asking additional details of the homesteader's visit, I supposed. Soon we left. Hoyt appeared preoccupied. I asked him, after a time, what was on his mind. He shrugged.

"Encarnacion says Ellis rode up to the look-out station last night—he followed his tracks afterward. And I keep wondering why Clay didn't stop in to say howdy. It doesn't look right. We'll have to watch that fellow closer, from now on. I told Encarnacion to telephone if he comes up again."

The days that followed were idyllic—crisp mornings, warm noons, long fire-lit evenings, with always the odorous scent of pines in the air and the wide outdoors for a work-room. Together Hoyt and I worked on fire-trails, climbed the ladder of the fire-tower to the lookout platform at intervals, wrangled horses, cut wood, cooked and ate hugely, slept the sleep of the dead—lived in an existence remote from what I had hitherto regarded as actuality, insulated from the world I had always deemed real.

WE were cleaning up one morning after breakfast when the phone-bell rang. Hoyt answered it, talking at length. When he reappeared, he was smiling.

"Imbrie," he said in answer to my look of inquiry, "what do you suppose he's done?"

I shook my head.

"The letter came from Washington turning down Ellis' homestead application. And the Super instead of wishing the job of telling Ellis on us, rode out to the claim himself and gave Clay what-for. Told him he'd heard about his war-talk and that he'd have to pull his freight right now—got the drop on him and made him pack and hit the trail, riding with him till he got clean off the forest and was headed south for Clifton."

I couldn't help but feel relieved by this news. I hadn't consciously worried much over the homesteader's threats, but it's never pleasant to imagine some one may start shooting, with oneself as target, if the mood strikes him.

Hoyt went on:

"Another thing not quite so good. The Super wants me to come in and help him in the office. Reckon you can make out here alone all right, now Clay's left?"

He looked concerned, a fact which irked me slightly. I'd learned the lookout's job pretty well by now and for the rest felt myself a seasoned woodsman.

"Why not?" I retorted.

"I'll leave the rifle and Hector," Hoyt added, "just in case. And there's the phone, if anything happens."

I cooked and ate supper and cleared up afterward. Then, piling wood on the fire, I stretched out with my pipe for a smoke before turning in. Hector, who missed Hoyt also and had followed me about mournfully all day, lay across from me now, his head on his forepaws, gazing into the fire. . . .

I was knocking out my pipe preparatory to turning in when Hector raised his

head suddenly and growled low in his throat, his hackles lifting.

"What is it, Hector?" I asked, thinking that some woods animal had ventured near the clearing.

The dog, giving no sign that he heard, rose and moved stiff-legged toward the wall of woods across the glade. I leaped to my feet and started for the rifle that stood behind the cabin door. At that moment a gun cracked in the woods opposite, and a bullet fanned my cheek.

I stopped short, staring at the spot whence the shot had come. Hector was racing across the clearing. As I stood, the gun sounded again and the dog shot forward and fell in a heap. I ducked and ran for the cabin.

I was safe there, and could watch the starlit glade from door and window. But the sight of Hector, wounded and trying feebly to crawl back for aid, made me forget caution. Seizing the rifle and stuffing a pocket with shells, I emerged from shelter and started toward the dog.

As I passed through the door, the hidden marksman fired again, and the bullet smacked into the door-frame beside me. Checking abruptly I dropped to one knee and emptied the magazine of the repeater toward the place whence the firing seemed to be coming. Then I reloaded hastily and ran to Hector.

To my relief, no more shots came. Instead I heard a sudden scramble of hoofs and their receding tattoo down the south trail that led to Encarnacion's station.

Hector was bleeding badly, and I had trouble in finding where the bullet had gone in. Then I saw that it had struck the dog's shoulder and plowed along his side, a gory but not a mortal wound.

I TOOK the dog in my arms and carried him to the cabin, where I washed and dressed the ugly gash as well as I could. I was putting the finishing touches to the dressing when the phone rang.

The welcome voice of Encarnacion came over the wire.

"The Señor Jeem," he said, "is he there?"

I told him Hoyt had gone to town, and he said:

"The Señor Ellis have come back. His horse's tracks go toward the lookout—"

"He's been here," I broke in, "pot-shooting at me. He's riding back down. Be careful, Encarnacion."

There was a pause; then the boy's voice came again:

"He have start' a fire in the cañon. I go now to fight it. Will you come to help?"

"Sure," I said, the escaping homesteader promptly taking second place in my thoughts, "soon as I can get there."

Luckily the pinto was hobbled and easily caught. I saddled and bridled him, and with a last look at Hector, took the south trail at a lope, and soon joined Encarnacion in the work of fighting the flames.

The fire was small, luckily, scarcely an acre in extent, and before long we had brought the blaze under control.

When the last spark was out, I told Encarnacion what had happened at the look-out camp. He nodded.

"The Señor Ellis is bad *hombre*," he commented.

"What gets me—Hoyt says Imbrie rode off the forest with him and warned him not to come back."

Again the boy nodded.

"I see the Señores Ellis and Imbrie leave this morning, and I theenk the Señor Ellis will come back—"

"What made you think that?"

Encarnacion shrugged.

"I watch," he went on without answering my question; "and tonight when the fire start, I come down, careful, so I make no noise. I hear a horse on the trail above. I look up. I see the Señor Ellis riding toward the fire-tower. And I find his horse's tracks down here where the fire start. That is when I go back to the ledge to phone the Señor Jeem, and you answer."

"Do you think there's a chance we'd find Ellis at his cabin? He was heading that way."

Encarnacion shot me a quick look.

"May-be," he replied tonelessly.

"Well," I decided, "I'm going down there on the chance, anyhow. You can come or not as you wish."

"I weel go too," said the boy.

WE set out in single file, Encarnacion on foot in the lead; I followed on horseback, with the gun across my saddle. For a time the boy took the cattle-trail down the cañon bed, then swung left and entered the trail from the top that led to the nester's claim. He said nothing; nor did I, as we progressed. In an hour or less we had entered the draw where stood the cabin we sought.

The door of the shack was closed, but through chinks in the logs a yellow gleam shone, stronger than the starlight. A

little to one side a saddled horse stood, head lowered as if tired.

"The Señor Ellis is there," whispered Encarnacion, nodding toward the shack.

I dismounted and crept forward, holding Hoyt's rifle ready. The Indian followed noiselessly. We stopped before the door, listening. All was silent.

"I'm going in," I muttered, and pushed the door open.

By the light of a candle-stub on the table I saw the homesteader sprawled face downward on the floor before the hearth. A hand was stretched toward the hearth, in which a hole had been made by removing a large adobe brick. By the hole lay a tin box fallen on its side.

I TOOK a step forward, calling Ellis' name. There was no answer, nor any movement of the body on the floor. I moved cautiously toward the prone figure and leaned, turning the head. The features were swollen and distorted.

I drew back, feeling slightly sick. The tin box caught my eye. Taking it up, to my surprise I found it half full of money, gold and bills—loot, no doubt from some earlier adventure outside the law.

I looked at Encarnacion. The boy had turned the body over, disclosing the puffed features. He pointed to two small punctures in the neck, near where the body joined it.

I stared at the Indian. His eyes were gleaming. A look of exultation lay on his copper face. Then as he caught my look his face went blank. He said slowly: "It is where a snake strike, señor. My friends the snakes do not love one who keel them without cause."

I thought quickly. Why had Encarnacion said, awhile ago in the cañon, that he had expected Ellis to return, unless he knew of the cache the ranger had returned to retrieve, with vengeance on myself a side issue? How had the boy so speedily discovered the snake-bite, unless he expected to find it?

My thoughts reached out. I saw Encarnacion spying on the ranger, watching Ellis gloat over his stolen hoard. I saw him, knowing the nester would return, dig up the box and leave one of the small mountain rattlers there—death for the unwary outlaw. Yet how could one prove the facts?

They were never proved. No charges, even, were made against the Indian. But Ellis, the killer, had been slain by a youth whose nature was as ruthless, and more subtle, than his own.

The wife of a famous soldier of fortune had an adventure of her own while with her husband in the North Woods when he was recuperating from wounds.

By MARY
RICHARDSON



You Never Can Tell

"WHEN we camp tonight, we will cache the food in the trees." Clint had a way of saying things like that and never vouchsafing an explanation. And when I asked questions, I never knew what kind of a reply I was going to get: he might just grunt, or again it would be just blank silence. Sometimes he would give me a contemptuous look as much as to say: "Lord, how do dumb people like you ever get into the woods, anyway!"

Clint was an old dear, for all his grumpiness. He would sit back with his silent chuckle when I got into some kind of greenhorn trouble like trying to eat skunk berries, thinking they were wild currants. But his eyes were always open to see that I did not get into serious trouble. That was his business—a professional guide and prospector. "Wet nurse," he sometimes called himself with a gesture of contempt.

My husband was trying a "back to Nature" treatment for a bad back, a souvenir of the war. A canoe-paddle in his hand all day and a pack on his back over the portages, was his idea of medical treatment. Clint had served under him in the war, and he treated my husband like a spoiled son. He just tolerated me.

Sometimes I took an extra paddle in the canoe, but more often I sat there trailing a line overboard catching fish for the evening meal. For the portage I had my own pack, weighing thirty pounds with shoulder-straps and tump-line. Clint could carry over two hundred pounds with his tump-line, and my husband got to where he could do almost as well.

We were heading north for James' Bay. Four weeks out of Dane, our last railroad

contact. Larder Lake, Abitibi Lake, Bear Lake and so on north—lakes and streams, paddles and pack. We had become adjusted; our boots were broken in; our faces were covered with fly dope that smelled to high heaven, but did help to keep off the little pests. I had tried a mosquito-net over my head but found that it only suffocated me. The dope was tough on the complexion but it was better than the flies.

"We hang the food in the trees."

I pondered over that statement of Clint's. We were going upstream around white water, packing it. A ten-mile portage, Clint said. I mulled the question over in my mind for a full mile; then I asked: "Clint, why do the things have to be put in the trees?"

"Dogs," grunted Clint. "That Indian camp back there on the other side of the river. Indian dogs are the worst thieves in the world."

I didn't believe him. No dog could ever, or so I thought, swim that stream with all its rapids—and they were miles behind us anyhow. But I knew that if Clint said things went into the trees, into the trees they would go.

We came to a place where the shore line opened out into a little park, an old Indian camp-ground, Clint told us. All the pine trees had deep pockets cut into them and were full of pitch, furnishing material for the repair of canoes, Indian birchbark or prospector's canvas. Birch wood with its oily bark was plentiful, the ideal firewood for camp, making a hot fire with but little smoke.

It was still an hour before darkness, but we started early in the morning and camped early in the evening. Husband

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unrolled the tents while Clint cut poles. I brought water from the stream. In twenty minutes the tents were pitched, my husband was out chopping wood, and Clint was busy between the fire and cleaning fish. I was getting the beds arranged for the night. Each one of us had his own task.

JUST before dark another party arrived: two men. They were not packing, but were hauling their canoe upstream with a harness of ropes. They unloaded and pitched their camp a few yards from us. When I looked at them, I felt like a seasoned veteran. They were sunburned, and their faces were covered with fly-bites, little black spots of blood under the skin that made them look like freckled freaks. Their clothes were unsuited to the trail, and though they must have been in the bush for some time, they had a lot of trouble in getting their fire started and finally came over to our camp and borrowed some embers from ours. It seemed their matches had got wet, and they did not know about waterproof match-cases.

Our meal was prepared in Clint's usual prompt style. We ate in silence. Lake trout, broiled over the coals, the cold meat of a young beaver, which tasted like wild duck. Flour gravy, with biscuits baked in a reflecting oven alongside the fire, and our regular dessert of speckled dog—boiled rice and raisins.

As we sat drinking our tea, Clint kept cussing under his breath and looking over to where our neighbors were struggling with a smoky fire. Finally he gave a gruff chuckle and turned to me with an embarrassed grin on his mahogany-colored face. "Lady, I guess I've been kind of hard on you on this trip. I was frank about women being out of place in the North Woods; but by golly, I believe I'd rather have a dozen like you on my hands than two tenderfeet like them." And with a snort of disgust Clint walked over to the other camp, where with a few well-directed words and acts he straightened out the strangers. He showed them how to rig a frame over their fire so they could hang their buckets without spilling their contents and putting out the fire. He showed them what kind of wood to burn. Then as an added gesture he told them how to mix the pine-pitch and bacon-grease and make a dope to spread over their faces as a protection against the black-fly. As he left them, I heard him call back: "Tie your supplies to the

tree limbs tonight—hang it high with ropes, away from the dogs and porcupines."

I was down at the river washing my face when one of the campers came down with their dinner dishes. Carefully he placed them in the water, weighting them down with small stones. I watched the operation with interest, thinking maybe I would learn something new about washing dishes, but the man started to walk away. That was too much for me, I just had to find out why, so I asked him.

"What's the idea of leaving the dishes in the water? Do you expect the current will clean them for you?"

"Oh, no, loidy, it aint the water; it's the little fishes, the little whitebaits. They comes up and cleans the dishes for us, and in the morning they're all spick and span. Smart, I calls it."

Later when I told the story at our camp-fire, Clint mused in silence for a few minutes, then burst into a chuckling laugh. "Not so dumb, not so dumb! By golly, I've been in these woods all my life and never thought of that!"

FOR a man who had spent the greater part of his life in camps Clint was a miracle of cleanliness. If we stayed a week in a camp, it was left just as clean as when we came, often cleaner. Dishes were washed as soon as the meal was over. Clothing was washed as soon as soiled. If husband or I wanted to get a call-down, all we had to do was to throw a fish-bone on the ground. That man was a camp tyrant; but he told me his story about a dirty camp, and then I got his viewpoint.

"I had cached my canoe," said Clint, "and pushed on about twenty miles into the hills, prospecting a range where I hoped to find gold. I killed a moose, and while cutting it up, my ax slipped on a bone, and buried the head in the calf of my leg. I tied it up the best I could, cut a stick for a crutch and headed back for my canoe and supplies. It took me four days to make that twenty miles. The last two or three miles I dragged myself. The leg was swollen twice its normal size and was looking bad. I had no more bandages, so used the old ones. That was my mistake.

"By the time I got to my canoe I knew I would have to get out to a doctor, and get there quick. . . . I remember heading into the white water of a rapids. . . . I woke up in the little hospital of a wood-pulp camp. They told me I had been

brought in by Indians who had been fishing below the rapids. I lay in the hospital for five months," Clint wound up, "while they experimented and talked about cutting off my leg, and all because I had tied it up with a dirty rag. I've never had a serious accident since, but there's the tin box with clean bandages and everything needed, just in case."

NEXT morning we took our supplies down from the tree-limbs and cooked breakfast. Our neighbors were still asleep. They stirred out as we were packing—and then came howls of grief. They had not followed Clint's advice or example about their supplies. Everything they had in camp that a dog could possibly eat was gone or destroyed. Bacon, sugar, even the bag of flour was broken and scattered over everything.

Clint spent thirty minutes with them, gave them a piece of bacon and a bucket of beans, and they headed back downstream, whipped to a frazzle because they had not listened to the advice of an old-timer in the country.

"What did you say to them, Clint?" I asked.

"I just cussed them," said Clint with an embarrassed grin. "That's about all some people can understand. This North Country is a great place, but you can't fool with her."

We made a semi-permanent camp on a small lake. We fished, swam in the cold water and tried to get pictures of the moose that came down to the lake to escape the black-flies and to eat the lily-pads. Sometimes there were as many as a dozen moose in the water at one time.

Husband was feeling like a new man. Clint used to lay him over a log, out in the sun, and rub his back until he yelled for mercy, but I got an insight into their friendship when I heard my husband say: "Damn you, Sergeant, if I was such a bad officer that you want to murder me now, why didn't you let me stay out there in No Man's land that time I was crooked?"

And Clint said: "If I'd have known how much trouble you were going to be I *would* have left you. Now lie still and take your medicine."

That was the first time I ever knew that Clint had won his D.C.M. for packing my husband in when he was wounded in a trench raid. . . .

We had found a patch of raspberries growing on a rocky hillside. One morning I took a bucket and announced my

intention of picking enough berries for a pie. My husband and Clint were going after trout. Clint growled:

"Well, I guess you can take care of yourself; but lady, these woods are full of bears, so watch yourself."

"But they're not dangerous," I countered. "You told me so yourself."

"All animals are dangerous at times. Trouble is you never know when or why that time is. Take the rifle with you, just in case; and remember, bears are curious. If a bear comes near you, just stand still. Chances are he'll look you over and then go away. But be careful."

I had my pail half filled with berries. I had worked near the center of the patch, and paused to rest a few minutes under the shade of a large white birch tree. I set the pail down and rested the rifle against the tree—it was a twenty-two high-power. I noticed the front sight was missing; it must have got caught in the brush, and pulled out.

I started to move on; then I caught a flash of movement, out of the corner of my eye. I turned, and there through a cleared space in the bushes was a black bear, coming toward me with a sidewise sort of gallop that carried a lot of speed. I didn't think it alarming; I'd seen plenty of these little black bears since we came to this country. I stood perfectly still as Clint had told me to do. It worked. About fifty feet from me the bear came to a halt, reared up on its hind feet and looked me over. I never moved.

A FULL minute we stared at one another, I getting more nervous all the time, and the bear swinging its head from side to side as though unable to make up its mind. Then it decided. It dropped down to all fours, and I heaved a sigh of relief. Then like a flash it was coming toward me again, and I could hear its growls.

I dropped the pail of berries and raised the rifle, then realized that it had no sight. With the rifle raised I stood stark still, and again the bear stopped and stood up. I took the best aim I could along the rifle-barrel and waited; it was up to the bear. It wasn't a big bear, and somehow I didn't seem to get frightened. Then it started down again, and I moved. Up it reared and made a spring forward, flailing its forefeet. I fired, and fast as I could, levered in another shell. It wasn't needed. The bear gave a spring forward and fell, face down, and never moved. Just ten feet away.

When I realized the bear was dead, I became frightened, and I trembled all over. I had actual proof of what Clint had said: "You never can tell what a wild animal is going to do."

I fired three spaced shots into the air, our signal for help, and then sank down against the tree. I heard an answering shot, then their shouts, and a few minutes later my husband and Clint broke through the bushes into the berry-patch. When Clint saw the dead bear, he stood there and cursed for a full minute. He turned the bear over and said: "You've shot a fat mamma bear, there'll be cubs around somewhere. Well, she's fat, and we might as well have some bear-steaks for a change—and the pelt's not bad."

He reached up to cut a limb from the tree. With his hand in the air he stood there; then he burst out laughing. We looked up, and there in the tree under which I had been resting, were two baby bears. They were fairly well-grown cubs—big enough, Clint said, to take care of themselves. But that supplied the answer as to why the bear had attacked out of turn. And I cried.

We left the cubs in the tree, and next morning they were gone. . . .

We made fine time on our way out, for we shot rapids that we had had to portage on the way in. On the downward trip we met one of the tragedies of the North Country. An Indian woman signalled us from the shore. Clint jabbered with her for a few minutes, then turned to us. "There's been an accident; come with me. Lady, you'd better stay here; this may not be nice."

Half an hour later my husband returned to the canoe for a shovel. He looked rather white around the mouth. "There's a dead Indian out there," he told me. "We've got to bury him."

Later they reconstructed the story for me. The woman's Indian husband had either been attacked by a moose or had shot and wounded it. He had fired twelve bullets into the animal from his old smooth-bore forty-four. The moose lay dead, but a few feet away lay the Indian, trampled to death, every bone in his body broken.

They buried the body where it lay, and the Indian wife followed us downstream in her canoe, stolid in her grief. Again I remembered Clint's saying: "You never can tell what a wild animal will do."

When we parted with Clint, he said to me: "Come back in the fall and we'll get a moose." I had made the inner circle.

Food for

*Bandits of various sorts
give a relief worker
plenty trouble.*

THE notorious Twelfth Red Army of Soviet Russia violently invaded the peaceful Republic of Georgia in March, 1921, marching bloodily down from Baku on the Caspian to Batum on the shore of the Black Sea, where the Georgian nationalists made a last stand.

Passenger and commercial traffic on the country's single railroad was at a standstill. The Red army had commandeered everything on wheels to transport heavy garrisons to newly advanced boundaries. This was almost tragic for a fellow-American, director of the local Near East Relief office, established to aid Armenians in the hinterland. His supply trains into Armenia, already many days delayed by actual warfare, now faced further delay because of military operations. After long, wrangling negotiations, army authorities agreed to route through one food train.

"The only catch is," he told me later, "I have no one I can trust to send in charge of the train. I can't leave Batum with the warehouses here full of supplies the Reds would confiscate the minute I left town."

Briefly, he explained, he would consider it a life-saver if I would volunteer to convoy a train of food and medical supplies as far as Tiflis, where the Near East Relief maintained a staff.

Thus it was that several days later I left Batum bound for Tiflis with a train of twenty-three cars loaded with miscellaneous supplies. Each car bore a large placard identifying it as the property of the Near East Relief, and telling whether it contained condensed milk, sugar, flour, white beans or medical supplies. To guard the train, I was given a detail from the Red army consisting of sixteen Chinese mercenaries commanded by a Jewish corporal, who the previous week had been a sophomore in the local high-school.

The Chinese soldiers were remarkable more for their zeal than for discretion. When the train halted along the road, they shot without discrimination at every

Armenia

By PAUL
CHEVALIER

person in sight, not excepting me, one another, and even their own corporal. He and I retired to the protection of a car near the middle of the train, and relied on our warlike Chinese soldiers to keep marauders away.

Hard luck overtook us before we had gone twenty miles; one of our cars developed a hot-box. The bearing melted away, and the car had to be shunted onto a siding and abandoned. I noted that the disabled car contained canned milk, and made a memorandum on my manifests. Too bad, I thought, it was not a bean car, or at least a flour car. Milk, I had been told, was badly needed for children in the orphanages up in Armenia.

Ten miles on, a second car went out of commission, and after a few miles further a third. Investigation revealed they both contained sugar, our next most valuable commodity in point of need in Armenia. This time we harangued the Chinese soldiers into stacking their rifles, conscripted several gawking villagers at the scene, and dumped the contents of a bean-car into a station shed. Into the emptied car we transferred sugar from one disabled car. We repeated the process with a flour-car, and moved the second car of sugar.

Suspicious by now because only sugar- and milk-cars were running hot-boxes, the corporal and I investigated. We discovered the journal boxes had been drained and the oil and wicking replaced with sand! Search along the train revealed that every sugar- and milk-car had been tampered with.

After long hours of work we cleared the boxes and put in new lubricants. The corporal came forward with a suggestion. We shuffled the placards on the cars. From sugar- and milk-cars we ripped the signs and nailed them to cars loaded with flour or beans. Flour or bean labels were put on milk- and sugar-cars. Then we got under way, confident that if any cars were disabled they were likely to be loaded with flour or beans, rather than the precious milk and sugar.

Every few miles we were shunted onto a siding to give right-of-way to a troop train or one loaded with military equipment. Hours elapsed in these waits. Nights we laid over on sidings while the train-crew slept, for there was no crew relief and no change of locomotives available to us. Everybody slept, that is, everybody but the vigilant Chinese. They seemed to be forever sleepless and always firing off their rifles.

On the third day we came to the foot of a long, steep grade leading up and over the great divide to Michailoff through the famous tunnel of the same name. The load was too much for our decrepit locomotive, which by this time was spouting steam from every joint. Aid came unexpectedly when a locomotive was dropped off from the rear end of a double-header after pushing it over the top to our side of the mountains. Meanwhile our train had pulled back out onto the main line. The extra engine from the other train was cut off from return unless it helped us over the slope. We held high cards in the argument which followed, and finally assailed the grade, shoved half-heartedly from the rear by our unwilling recruit.

Halfway up it seemed we could go no farther. I cursed the engineer on the forward locomotive and we all disembarked and threw sand under its wheels.

The engineer insisted he was giving all he had. "That dog on the back is loafing," he waived. "He gets a bonus on all the fuel he can save, and he's saving plenty at the rate he's pushing."

"I'll soon fix that," I told him, and dropping off the engine step, I waited until half the train of twenty cars had passed me. Boarding the tenth car, I reached in and tripped the coupling. Since the air was operating only on the two locomotives and their tenders, no brakes were set. The front engine's labored puffs quickened immediately. The train parted in the middle, and the front portion forged sturdily ahead under the tug of the relieved locomotive.

I waved a derisive highball to the surprised engineer on the rear engine when he leaned from his cab. He shook an angry fist at me, and for a tense moment I doubted whether my ruse would work.

Suddenly the figure of a Chinese guard, rifle in hand, appeared on the top of the rear car nearest the locomotive. Gesticulating frantically toward the departing front half of the train, the soldier apparently held the engineer personally re-

sponsible for the break. He grimly brought his rifle to the shoulder and drew a wavering bead on the engineer's protruding head. The head was yanked in like a turtle's, and I knew I had won when the rear half began to belch smoke and steam.

IT was a short-lived victory. Toward evening we pulled into Michailoff station on the other side of the divide. The young Red officer in charge of the station and yards—the *komisar*—refused us a clearance. The engineer of the hijacked engine accused me of crimping his locomotive. My own guards accused me of attempting to run away with half the train. The *komisar* of police arrived, accompanied by a retinue of satellites, and gravely informing I might be a spy carrying a trainload of supplies to some capitalistic enemy.

In short, I was taken from the train and spent the early part of the night in the stationmaster's office answering silly questions, and wondering between questions whether I would be shot. This was not as remote a chance as it might seem, for these swashbuckling youngsters were the supreme law. Several of them wore the uniforms of the Cheka, the all-powerful revolutionary police.

Knowing Russians, I was not surprised that questioning was abruptly suspended when one man said: "Let us have a drink and eat a little."

"Drink what?" asked another, and turning to me: "Have you any brandy in that car of medical supplies?"

Having in mind that the Near East Relief is largely supported by contributions from churches in the Bible Belt, I told him I thought not. Nevertheless the car was broached and its contents searched. No brandy was found among the rifled goods. The *komisars'* comments became uncomfortably caustic and threatening. Hoping some local resident might sell me vodka where they would fear to deal with the Reds, I volunteered to go search for a drink.

"Mind you don't come back with any of that damned vinegar they drink around here," I was admonished as I left.

I knocked at several doors along the darkened streets, but householders were still terrorized by the Red invasion and refused to talk with me. I was about to turn back when I heard strains of music in the distance. I recognized the instrument as a *zurna*, a blaring reed pipe played exclusively out of doors. Hope

revived, for outdoor music betokened a wedding or christening; either of which surely meant something to drink.

I hastened through crooked lanes; on the outskirts of the town I intercepted a small procession on foot following a creaking bullock-cart in which sat a very old man. It was a wedding party, I could tell from the bride's finery revealed in the flickering light of torches carried by the celebrants. But far more important—it was an Armenian wedding!

No missionary back home ever painted such a harrowing picture of starving Armenians as I did in the next few minutes. In brief, I told the wedding party, unless I could get the *komisars* genially drunk, I should probably be shot and the food-train would never reach their hungry compatriots in Armenia.

"Here, friend, it is a small sacrifice," the old man in the cart quavered, and he lifted up a wine-skin from the floor.

"No wine," I demurred. "They warned me not to bring back wine."

"This is not wine, but good home-made grape brandy," the old man explained, and he added a string of smoked fish to the gift of brandy.

I grabbed the proffered skin, and from the feel of its greasy folds I estimated it must contain at least two gallons of liquor. The potency of Georgian *chacha* is notorious, and I foresaw success.

Russians have a surprising capacity for liquor. Two solid hours of drinking elapsed before I dared ask for my train.

"A clearance for your train?" the *komisar* vacantly repeated my timid request. "Why, to be sure! You are a fine fellow, and can have anything you wish."

HIS sudden agreement was as absurd and unreasonable as his original refusal, but I refrained from comment. With a flourish he signed and stamped an order, and gravely conducted me to the door through which I fled in search of the dispatcher.

A case of milk to this man, some sugar to another, and in less than half an hour my train was again under way, with a clear track through to Tiflis—which I reached the following morning.

In time of peace, the trip from Batum to Tiflis consumed about ten hours. It had taken us more than four days—and I still had the return trip to make! I did it on horseback in twelve days.

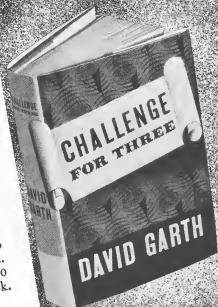
The food train never reached Armenia. It was expropriated by the Red Army two hours after I delivered it at Tiflis.

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